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# **SECRETS OF FAMOUS ILLUSIONISTS**







WILL GOLDSTON

# SECRETS OF FAMOUS ILLUSIONISTS

By  
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FOUNDER OF THE MAGICIANS' CLUB

With a Foreword by  
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'THE SECRETS OF HOUDINI' (8TH THOUSAND)



LONDON  
**JOHN LONG, LIMITED**  
34, 35 & 36 PATERNOSTER ROW

MCMXXXIII



## FOREWORD

**N**O ghosts of great magicians should rise up to reproach Will Goldston for unveiling their mysteries. He has striven to pay homage to their genius, to the skill with which they conceived their illusions, the showmanship which made them celebrated, and able always to command our admiration, our wonder, and delight. He has drawn aside the curtain to show the brilliant ingenuity behind illusions which in their time have thrilled thousands. He has told of the drama in the private lives of some of these world figures, of the men as they were in shadow and light.

The story of Chung Ling Soo, the illusionist who met his death on the stage of a London music-hall in the view of thousands, is, for example, a little classic of its kind. Will Goldston tells in these pages for the first time the whole truth about the affair, explaining in detail the secret of the rifle used in Chung Ling Soo's bullet-catching illusion, which caused the great magician's death. He dissipates, too, some earlier legends concerning the tragic end of Lafayette, the famous magician, who died in a theatre fire in Edinburgh; he talks intimately about the Maskelyne family, of Devant, Horace Goldin, and himself. Along the path of Goldston's story come Carl Hertz, with his bird-cage trick, de Kolta, with his "Vanishing Lady," J. N. Maskelyne with Psycho, his automaton, and a group of lesser but none the less fascinating personalities of world magic. He tells of fraudulent mediums and their methods, and of ghosts, real and spurious; he tells many tales out of school, but none is malicious.

That Goldston has told so much will cause controversy in some quarters, but I do not agree with those who think that the secrets of illusionists should never be exposed. Indeed, I believe that when the public have been deceived



for a quarter of a century with a famous trick there is no harm in telling them at last how it was done—and at the same time showing them a new one.

When Horace Goldin's illusion, "Sawing through a Woman," was exposed after he had travelled the world with it, he just laughed and devised another form of the same trick and made it more baffling than ever. The really clever and resourceful magician will always do that.

Although so much is given away in this book, I dare to say that I could, with ease, deceive with the simplest of tricks the average person after he had read it.

Although I claim to know a great deal about magical secrets—my research into the work of Houdini alone lasted more than four years—I am frequently mystified by a good conjuring trick.

I can with truthfulness say of this book by Will Goldston that it is the most interesting contribution to the literature of magic and illusions that I have ever read.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

	PAGE
THE TRUTH ABOUT CHUNG LING SOO . . . . .	17
"Chinaman" whose real name was Robinson—His famous bullet-catching illusion; how it led to his death on a London stage—The secret of the rifle—Other illusions of Chung Ling Soo.	

## CHAPTER II

THE ROMANTIC STORY OF CARL HERTZ . . . . .	31
A trick with a canary that caused a national controversy—My challenge to Hertz—The secret of the bird-cage—Was there cruelty?	

## CHAPTER III

THE GREAT LAFAYETTE—THE MOST HATED MAGICIAN . . . . .	44
His passion for his dog "Beauty"—The drama of his death in a theatre fire—Some popular legends exploded—The tragedy of the iron door.	

## CHAPTER IV

MASKELYNE AND THE PSYCHO SENSATION . . . . .	54
The Psycho sensation which baffled our grandfathers—An ingenious device and its secret.	

## CHAPTER V

HOUDINI AS I KNEW HIM . . . . .	60
Some new facts—His first interest in magic—More of Houdini's secrets revealed.	

## CHAPTER VI

DID HOUDINI FAIL? . . . . .	69
A handcuff challenge and the sequel—An assertion I did not believe.	

## CHAPTER VII

PAGE

SOME MORE NEW FACTS ABOUT HOUDINI . . . . .	73
---	----

His love of publicity and the results—Some Houdini thrills the public missed—His film failure and a broken friendship.

## CHAPTER VIII

DE KOLTA'S "VANISHING LADY" SECRET . . . . .	84
--	----

His many imitators—The secret of an ingenious illusion—The expanding die—An inventor of many effective tricks.

## CHAPTER IX

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE INDIAN ROPE TRICK . . . . .	91
---	----

Fact or legend?—An impossible effect—Other popular deceptions of the fakirs.

## CHAPTER X

TRICKS OF BOGUS MEDIUMS . . . . .	97
-----------------------------------	----

Ghosts real and unreal—Ingenious deception in the séance room—A magician among the spirits—Ghosts that walk in the dark.

## CHAPTER XI

WHY I AM A SPIRITUALIST . . . . .	110
-----------------------------------	-----

My first interest in survival—My original scepticism—What happened to me—Convinced by a blind medium—I watch for trickery.

## CHAPTER XII

MEDIUMS I HAVE SAT WITH . . . . .	115
-----------------------------------	-----

A record of twenty-five years' investigation—A survey and a summary—Some puzzling facts—Rudi Schneider and others.

## CHAPTER XIII

MAGIC AND CRIME . . . . .	133
---------------------------	-----

A point of contact—Deception by the magician and the crook—Some tricks of card-sharpers explained in detail—Other clever race-course swindles.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT KELLAR . . . . .	140
----------------------------	-----

Harry Kellar, the great but unscrupulous magician—A clever man who plagiarised—The showman who victimised Maskelyne—His search for a successor.

## CONTENTS

11

### CHAPTER XV

PAGE

- HOWARD THURSTON'S RISE TO RICHES . . . . . 143  
Kellar's appointed successor—From potato-peeler seller  
to millionaire.

### CHAPTER XVI

- ZANCIGS AND THEIR BRILLIANT THOUGHT-READING CODE . 145  
How they baffled the world—Zancig's humble start in life  
—An accident which altered his career—Northcliffe  
impressed—The theory of Napoleon of Fleet Street.

### CHAPTER XVII

- HOW ZOMAH DELAYED A MURDER . . . . . 152

### CHAPTER XVIII

- DAVID DEVANT—MASTER MAGICIAN . . . . . 155  
His great contribution to English magic—A classic name—  
The box escape—My memorable visit to Devant—A much  
misunderstood man.

### CHAPTER XIX

- A KING OF MODERN CONJURERS . . . . . 160  
Horace Goldin—A strikingly original illusionist—How  
Goldin outwitted the New York police.

### CHAPTER XX

- A MEDLEY OF MAGICIANS . . . . . 165  
Chevalier Ernst Thorn, Chefalo, John Mulholland.

### CHAPTER XXI

- MY MAGICAL LIFE . . . . . 170  
A strange story—Early beginnings—My sad experience  
with a magical salesman—First appearance as a conjurer—  
My impromptu act—The mystery of my resignation from  
the Magic Circle—Baffling my brother magicians.

### CHAPTER XXII

- "THE MAN WHO MADE ICE FAMOUS" . . . . . 190  
Van Hoven—How he started life as a pea-nut seller—  
Promotion to a bottle juggler—Bad conjurer who became  
a first-class comic turn.

### CHAPTER XXIII

- AN UNDERTAKER'S INTERRUPTION . . . . . 197  
The great Raymond—My adventure with him.

## CHAPTER XXIV

	PAGE
THE PRINCE WHO STABBED HIS PARTNER . . . . .	200
The dusky potentate and his manager—A laughable story with a tragic ending.	

## CHAPTER XXV

CEELEY AND THE NAKED LADY . . . . .	204
An improper story but a true one—The comedy of an illusionist's assistant and a button misadventure.	

## CHAPTER XXVI

DANTE'S "DISAPPEARING LADY" . . . . .	206
His experiences in Russia—How magic is accepted in the Soviet Republic.	

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE HANDCUFFED CLERGYMAN—AN ESCAPE THAT WENT WRONG . . . . .	211
--	-----

## CHAPTER XXVIII

A CONJURER'S RAPID COURTSHIP . . . . .	213
The great Maurice—Saw and wooed his wife in five minutes.	

## CHAPTER XXIX

MULLER THE MYSTIC . . . . .	217
Pathetic story of his return.	

## CHAPTER XXX

DILEMMA OF A PARLIAMENTARY MAGICIAN . . . . .	219
Mr. Frederick Montague's unrehearsed effects—An Under-Secretary as conjurer.	

## CHAPTER XXXI

THE CORNELLS AND THEIR GHASTLY PUBLICITY STUNT . . . . .	221
A queer thought-reading act and its purpose—A mortuary travesty.	

## CHAPTER XXXII

WISHART AND THE CORPSE . . . . .	223
Extraordinary adventure at a lodging-house.	

## CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TRAGEDY OF HANCO . . . . .	225
An escape artist who dressed himself as a convict—His fatal love affair.	

# CONTENTS

18

## CHAPTER XXXIV

PAGE

THE £ S. D. OF MAGIC . . . . .	227
Some facts and figures about the earnings of famous magicians.	

## CHAPTER XXXV

MISCELLANEOUS MAGIC . . . . .	234
Stage tricks and illusions and a collection of pocket tricks used by celebrated magical performers.	



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

WILL GOLDSTON . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
CHUNG LING SOO . . . . .	FACING PAGE 24
WILL GOLDSTON'S CHALLENGE TO CARL HERTZ . . . . .	38
A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED PICTURE OF LAFAYETTE . . . . .	48
THE LATE CAPTAIN CLIVE MASKELYNE . . . . .	56
AN UNUSUAL PICTURE OF HOUDINI IN FILM WORK . . . . .	64
MR. J. C. CANNELL . . . . .	76
LONG 'TACK SAM, THE GREAT CHINESE MAGICIAN, AND ASSISTANTS . . . . .	88
WILL GOLDSTON SHOWING STUDENT MEMBERS OF THE MAGICIANS' CLUB A NEW TRICK . . . . .	112
HARRY KELLAR, ONE OF THE GRAND OLD MEN OF MAGIC . . . . .	128
DAVID DEVANT, A MASTER MAGICIAN, AS HE APPEARED IN A MAGICAL PLAY . . . . .	156
HORACE GOLDIN . . . . .	162
ERNST CHEVALIER THORN . . . . .	176
CHEFALO AS THE GUEST OF INDIAN MAGICIANS . . . . .	184
THE ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE MAGICIANS' CLUB . . . . .	192
A TYPICAL MAGICIANS' CLUB GATHERING AT WHICH NEW TRICKS ARE PERFORMED . . . . .	208
ARNOLD DE BIERE . . . . .	228





## CHAPTER I

### THE TRUTH ABOUT CHUNG LING SOO

**N**OT in the whole story of magic is there more drama than in the manner by which Chung Ling Soo, Chinese illusionist—in reality, William E. Robinson, a Scots-American—came by his death.

Shot by a rifle used in his most spectacular illusion, Chung Ling Soo fell mortally wounded on to the stage in the full blaze of the footlights, while a crowded audience at the Wood Green Empire looked on, thrilled and horrified.

The nations were in a death grapple when Chung Ling Soo was killed at the climax of a stage illusion, for it was in March, 1918, that the crack of the rifle that killed him echoed in the capitals of Europe and America where he was known.

His dying was even more dramatic than that of the great Lafayette, burned in a theatre fire at Edinburgh, of whom I shall have more to say later. A great showman to the last, he managed, though lying in death agonies on the stage, to call out, "Ring down the curtain!"

The curtain did ring down, but it did not close the chapter of drama, or end the mystery of Chung Ling Soo and his death.

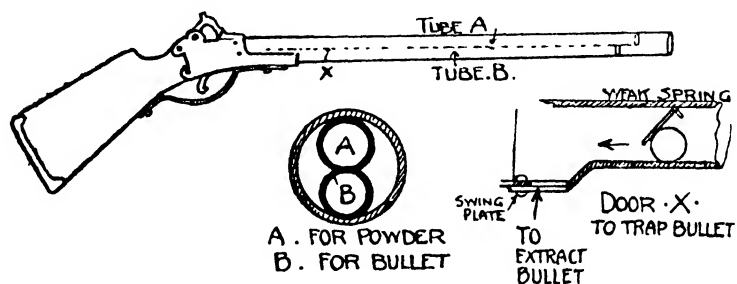
Completely in the dark as to the secret of Chung Ling Soo's bullet-catching illusion, and unaware of certain circumstances connected, as I believe, with his death, the public have for these fourteen years been left wondering about this strange affair.

And now, for the first time, I am going to reveal all the facts, including the secret of the illusion.

The trick began by the audience examining and marking four bullets taken to them by Soo's assistant. The bullets were taken to Soo, who openly loaded them into four

rifles after he had put in charges of powder and cotton-wool plugs. The four rifles were fired at Soo by four assistants and he caught the marked bullets on a plate held in front of him!

The illusion was really managed in a very simple way. The bullets were on a plate. In returning to the stage the assistant had no difficulty in retaining the marked bullets in her hand and letting four others roll on to the plate. The four marked bullets were secretly dropped into Soo's hand when the plate was handed to him, but the audience still saw four bullets on the plate and took them to be the marked ones.



The barrel of each rifle was divided down the centre with a partition—there were really two tubes in one large tube. Into the uppermost tube the powder was poured and rammed down with a plug of cotton-wool on the top. The bullet was dropped into the lower tube and thus was never near the powder. As an additional precaution the bullet was held in place by a clip, which normally would be a sufficient check on any tendency of the bullet to be ejected by the force of the explosion in the adjoining barrel. The rifles were fired and simultaneously Soo deftly allowed the marked bullets to drop from his hand on to the plate which he held in front of him.

Now the accident, or whatever it was, which caused Soo's death was due to a defect in one of the rifles. There was a minute hole between the two tubes in the barrel, and so the bullet, instead of being unaffected by the explosion of the powder, was—in spite of the clip, which never could hold the bullet in position in such circumstances—actually fired at close range.

He was not the first magician to be killed by this trick. Again and again his friends had warned him about doing it and had begged him to give it up. He refused, because of its great drawing power with the public, who love a feat that looks dangerous.

Seeing that you have now learned the secret of the illusion you will be the better able to consider with me some of the possibilities in the situation.

Was Chung Ling Soo murdered? No, I do not think so. I had given the matter a good deal of thoughtful attention, and I am convinced that not one of the enemies whom I knew Soo to possess would have been clever or unscrupulous enough to have planned such a terrible crime.

*But I am just as equally certain that there was at least one man who knew what was about to happen on that fateful Saturday night at the Wood Green Empire. That man was none other than Chung Ling Soo himself!*

Suicide—the most ingenious and cold-blooded suicide that was ever planned! That is my theory. Already I can hear the mocking, deriding cries of the sceptics asking me for proof. Of course, I have no proof. But the facts are pregnant with suspicion.

Let us examine the details of Soo's death. He was killed in his last trick on the second performance of a Saturday night. This illusion, known as "Catching the Bullets," was extremely good, and he had performed it on hundreds of previous occasions without the slightest hitch or difficulty.

On the fatal night everything seems to have gone wrong. A fraction of a second after the assistant pulled the trigger, Soo pitched forward on his face with a cry of "My God! You've shot me!"

The plate fell from his grasp, and was broken on the stage. *But it had not been shattered by the bullets.* This goes to prove that the magician had not held the plate over his chest according to his usual custom. Had he done so it must inevitably have been shattered. Why had Soo suddenly become so careless?

An examination of the rifle after the tragedy revealed

the fact that the *sealed barrel had been opened*. Was this by accident or design? There is no doubt that Soo would never have been shot had the rifle been in its usual condition. And, supposing that the rifle barrel had been deliberately opened, whose hand was responsible?

Again, I repeat, I have no proof. However, a friend of mine who must remain nameless, happened to call on Soo in the interval between the two performances. As my friend entered the dressing-room, he found the magician toying with the rifle. This fact takes on an added importance when one considers that any damage done to the rifle must have been done during the first and second performances on the Saturday night.

And what of the marked bullets—those which should have been caught on the plate? I made a personal search of the stage and auditorium of the theatre on the following Monday, shortly after the news of Soo's death had reached me. I found nothing. Thinking I might have overlooked them, and wishing to rid myself of the many uneasy suspicions in my mind, I offered to pay £1 for each of the marked bullets when found. Nobody ever claimed the reward. The bullets had disappeared as strangely and as mysteriously as if they had never existed.

I might add that I never expected the bullets to be recovered. I was convinced that they were in poor Soo's body.

On the night in question, Soo *loaded the rifle himself*. As I have already explained, this was a task which was allocated to a male assistant. Here again the magician departed from his usual mode of procedure for no apparent reason.

I think it will be generally agreed that I have outlined a pretty strong case against an accidental death. The details I have so far described are consistent with a deliberate and well-schemed suicide (I have already indicated that the theory of murder cannot be accepted). But no suicide theory can be considered complete unless a motive is supplied. Not even the most violent lunatic would take his own life for sheer blood-lust.

In this special case, the motive was not lacking. No t

long before the tragedy, Soo had asked my opinion on a domestic affair which was obviously worrying him a great deal. I had replied in a non-committal manner, for I was not anxious to be concerned in affairs that might adversely affect my professional reputation.

Lastly there was Soo's strange settlement of all his debts. On the Thursday before he was killed, he walked into my office in Green Street.

"Good morning, Will," he said, taking a chair, and helping himself to a piece of chocolate. "How much money do I owe you?"

I thought this an unusual greeting, and told him so. But he did not appear to be in the least disturbed.

"It's like this," explained. "I'm paying off all my debts. I guess it's just about time I got all my affairs in order. The sooner I get things straightened out, the better I shall like it."

He paid his account, and took his departure. As the door closed behind him, I little thought I had seen the last of a man whose dramatic death, two days later, was to startle the whole world. Why had Soo been so anxious to settle his liabilities?

There you have my theory with regard to Chung Ling Soo, as briefly as I can put it. In conclusion, I should like to tabulate the various points in the case, which, to my mind, point definitely to suicide.

- (1) Chung Ling Soo was worried by domestic troubles.
- (2) He cleared up all his business affairs before his death.
- (3) He was shot on his last performance on a Saturday night.
- (4) The gun which killed him had been tampered with.
- (5) Soo himself was seen handling the gun a few minutes before his performance.
- (6) The marked (real) bullets which were used in the trick were never found.
- (7) The plate was not shattered by the bullets, proving that Soo could not have held the plate before his chest according to his usual custom.
- (8) Soo himself loaded the rifle which fired the fatal shots.

Chung Ling Soo once told me that he never got very far in the magical world until he gave up doing small sleight of hand tricks to large audiences. Soo discovered from experience what he, with his vast knowledge of magic and audiences, should have known without putting the matter to the test, namely, that comparatively few members of the general public are so interested in magic that they will pay to see small sleight of hand tricks performed in a large hall.

Tricks of that kind, done under those conditions, appeal only to magicians who understand what is going on and can appreciate the fine points of each trick. A magician who presents small sleight of hand tricks in a large hall and expects to interest and amuse a huge audience—many members of which probably have great difficulty in seeing the tricks—is making trouble for himself. He is trying to force an audience to like something which they do not like. What would one say to a pianist who, engaged to play to huge audiences of jazz “fans,” persisted in making them listen to some of Chopin’s nocturnes?

Soo was not quite accurate when he said that he did not start to make a name for himself until he gave up sleight of hand work in public. It would be more correct to say that he got one foot firmly on the ladder of fame by giving up sleight of hand and, at the same time, thinking of something very much better—from the point of view of the general public. He quickly became famous all over the world after he had hit upon the idea of ceasing to be William E. Robinson and becoming Chung Ling Soo, the Chinese magician.

At that time there was a definite boom in “spectacular magic”; the public flocked to see almost any magician who could present a series of illusions in swift succession. Such performances were popular because people had no difficulty in seeing what was going on and—what was equally important—understanding it. The illusionist arranged his programme in such a way that he had no need to talk; his various tricks and illusions explained themselves.

At the same time the public were—as they always have

been and always will be—eager for novelty, and what better novelty could one think of at that time than an act of Chinese magic presented by a Chinaman? Soo did the thing well. He wore gorgeous Chinese robes; his assistants were suitably dressed; he had Chinese scenery, Chinese drop curtains, and so on. The fact that many of the tricks he showed were not Chinese did not matter in the least; the public were ignorant on that point and there was no need to enlighten them.

It is no secret that Chung Ling Soo would probably have never hit upon the idea of becoming a Chinese magician if a real Chinaman had not first shown the way. Soo did not copy this performer—far from it. It was soon obvious that the act presented by the man who was masquerading as a Chinaman was much more to the liking of the general public than the act which was genuine Chinese.

Soo's great success was undoubtedly due to the fact that, in addition to being a great magician, he was a magnificent actor. His make-up as a Chinaman was perfect, and deceived thousands of people into believing that the magician was really an Oriental. He acted the part perfectly. His slow, deliberate walk, the equally slow movement of his hands, the expression of his eyes, his bland little smile when he sprang a surprise on the audience, and his habit of shaking hands with himself when he was taking a curtain—all these things impressed audiences and served to convince them that Soo was really a Chinaman. He used to say that at times when he was on the stage he almost forgot that he was an American.

Perhaps part of his success was due to the fact that he had a good deal of a Chinaman's cunning in his own nature; he could be amusingly "deep" when it served his purpose to be so. Thus on a Monday morning, when he arrived at a town for a week's engagement, he was always at home at his hotel to the Press and to any amateur conjurers who cared to come along. What more natural at such a gathering than that someone should set the ball rolling by asking Soo to "show us a trick." The next step was equally natural. At such a merry, informal, friendly little party someone would have the audacity to ask the



great magician to explain how the trick was done. It was then that Soo's native cunning came to the top.

The average magician is very "close" when asked to give a trick away; his stock of excuses for not doing anything of the kind is unlimited! But Soo was much cleverer—much more subtle—than the average magician. At one of these private receptions he would do trick after trick, if he saw that his guests were interested, and if anyone dared to suggest that Soo might perhaps be persuaded to give a trick away—"something easy, that I can do"—he consented at once. Then, to anyone who was really behind the scenes and knew what was really happening, the fun would begin.

Soo would lead off by disclosing the secret of the trick he had been asked to explain. But he never stopped at that point. He would go on—and on—and on—doing tricks and explaining how they were done—as fast as he could. He knew that no one can remember a number of tricks performed in rapid succession; in fact, ninety-nine persons in a hundred could not remember the effects of the tricks. The explanations would merely bewilder and confuse them; afterwards they would not be able to recall one clearly.

This knowledge of those facts was up Soo's sleeve all the time. By doing many tricks and showing how they were done, he gained the reputation among amateur conjurers of being very kind and generous, and they always made a point of coming to Soo's show, bringing their friends and telling others that it was the greatest magical show in the world, and so on.

One imagines that when Soo was by himself he smiled that bland Chinese smile he had rehearsed so many times. He knew quite well that even a magician of great experience cannot possibly remember the secrets of a dozen or more tricks when they have been shown to him quickly, one after the other; some important details will always be forgotten. As a matter of fact, there is no harder test of a man's memory and power of observation than to ask him to describe exactly the effect of one trick he has just seen—just one trick. If the trick is a fairly long one, the



CHUNG LING SOO



feat is practically impossible to any ordinary man, and all magicians know this and trade on the knowledge.

Although Soo protected his secrets in this way when he was assailed by inquisitive strangers, he was kindness itself to any friends who were really interested in magic and knew something of the art. He was very kind to all children, and was never too tired to entertain any children he met in private life.

Magic was Soo's living, but it was also his hobby. At his home in Barnes he had fully equipped workshops and a wonder store of tricks and illusions. It was his habit, whenever he saw a trick or illusion that interested him, to have it made at once in his workshop ; he liked to look at the apparatus occasionally, even though he might never use it in public.

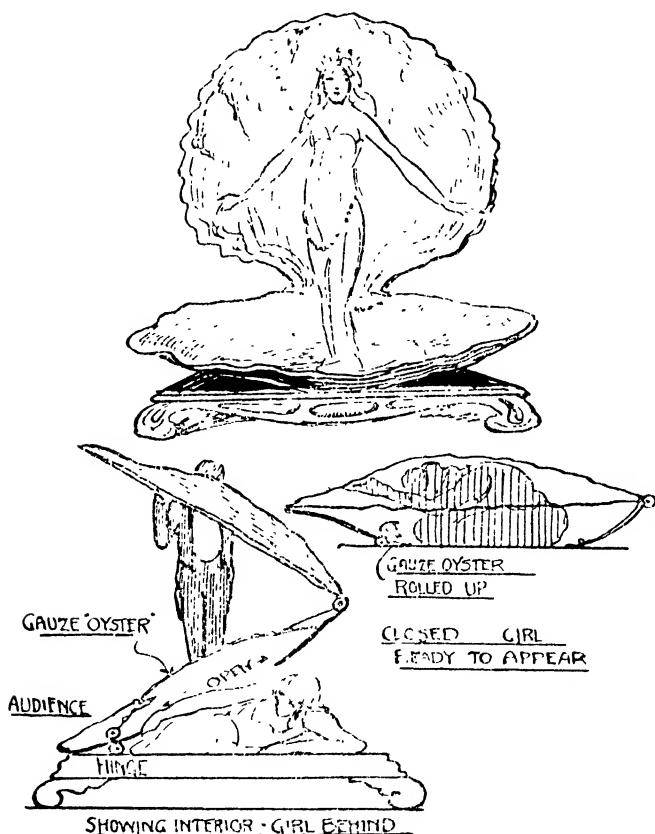
One of Soo's favourite tricks was the " Growing Roses." On paper there may seem to be nothing in the trick, but in Soo's hands it was a perfect mystery and an extremely pretty one.

On the stage were two tall pedestals. Soo showed the audience two large plant pots, and after he had filled them with earth, he placed them on the pedestals. He then held up a large cone-shaped cover to the audience and showed that there was nothing in it. (At that moment it actually was empty.) Soo then put the cover on one of the pots of earth and removed it. Nothing had happened. He walked over to the other pedestal, went through the same movements, but this time, when the cover was lifted, the audience saw a large rose-tree in bloom. Before the audience had recovered from that surprise, Soo gave them another—with the pot on the other pedestal.

The secret ? Very simple. Concealed behind the pedestals were two cone-shaped tubes which fitted into the cover when the cover was dropped over them, and each of those tubes held a rose-tree. After Soo had taken the cover off the pot the first time, he dropped it over the tube behind the pedestal, but only a magician who knew the trick, and knew exactly what Soo was going to do, ever saw him doing this ; the audiences never realised that for the fraction of a second the cover was out of their sight.

Another of Soo's favourite mysteries was "The Oyster Shell," a picturesque illusion.

The "Oyster Shell" was a delightful deception—very effective and yet the secret was simple. The third diagram shows the "shell" as shown to the audience, on a small raised platform. The top shell was closed over the lower,



and the whole shell was then flat on the platform. In a moment the top shell was raised and out stepped the "Pearl" from the "Oyster."

The assistant—as will be seen from the diagrams—was concealed behind the lower shell in the first place. The oyster in the shell was nothing more than gauze on a spring blind. Directly the top shell concealed the lower one, the

assistant released the spring, and so passed through in between the two shells.

Another extremely popular illusion which figured in Chung Ling Soo's programmes was "The Veiled Woman." In this case, a girl can be made to vanish.

Having taken up her place on the table, under which the audience can see, the girl, heavily veiled, remains motionless while the magician proceeds to cover her with a large sheet. Several times he places the sheet over her, and then snatches it away again as though he were anxious that the audience would have "one last look." Finally, he covers her with the sheet, and attaches it to a rope hanging from the flies. Having stepped down from the table, the conjurer picks up a revolver, fires it, and the woman vanishes.

Several ideas are contained in this illusion. To begin with, the veiled girl has a wire frame over the top of her head, and her veil and dress are in one piece. After the conjurer has placed the sheet over her and removed it a few times, the audience do not perceive that anything has happened, but, unknown to them, she has slipped away through a trap in the stage.

Her manner of departure was arranged in this way : for a few seconds, while taking the sheet from the girl, the conjurer allowed it to drop down and hide the table. In that moment, the woman slipped out of her dress and veil and, being in tights, had no difficulty in passing downwards, being assisted in her descent by an elevator trap. The veil and dress were prevented from falling because, a moment before, the conjurer held them in position by means of a small catch attached to his elbow. The wire frame under the veil kept it in place, and the audience were therefore unable to see that the woman had really gone.

The rope to which the conjurer apparently attached the sheet was a faked rope, being hollow, and fitted inside with a spring terminating in a hook. The conjurer placed this hook in the wire frame forming the headpiece, a hole in the top of the veil permitting this.

The sheet was wrapped round the figure, but the audience were led to believe that it was fastened to the rope. Attached to the hook in the rope was a thread, which, being

pulled by an assistant off the stage, released the hook, which thus drew up the wire frame into the hollow rope. The dress and the veil then fell on the table and were hidden by the sheet, and in this way the disappearance of the girl was effected.

Yet another illusion which was a particular favourite with Soo's public was "The Arbour Illusion."

In "The Arbour Illusion" is shown at the back of the stage an arbour which the audience can see is not occupied. A hammock is slung near the arbour; the performer wraps himself in a cloak, gets into the hammock and falls asleep. Gradually the figure of a woman appears in the arbour. She steps out, sings a song, and then returns to the arbour, fading away as mysteriously as she came, but while her figure is becoming indistinct, the audience see it change slowly into the figure of the performer. When the figure is quite plain to all, the performer steps out of the arbour, and an assistant comes in and draws away the cloak from the hammock.

The first thing to be explained is the manner in which the performer disappears from the hammock. He wraps himself in a cloak, but in doing so manages to raise a "strut," and this gives the appearance of his arms being under the cloak. The performer is behind the cloak, which hangs down to the floor and so enables him to escape through the back cloth.

The appearance and disappearance of the woman are caused by a sliding mirror, which passes diagonally across the arbour. At the commencement of the illusion, this mirror is in position across one corner of the arbour, and the woman is hidden behind it. The mirror reflects part of the side of the arbour which thus appears to be empty. The silvering of the mirror is etched away toward the edge, and so, when it is drawn slowly away, the woman is made to appear gradually. She comes out, sings her song, and returns to the arbour. When the mirror is being pushed back into its original position, to cause the disappearance of the woman, the performer's "double" stands in one corner of the wings, and his reflection in the mirror is taken to be the figure of the performer himself. The mirror is not

pushed right across, but only far enough to allow the woman to escape from the back and for the performer to take her place. Then the "double" leaves his position, and the glass, being pulled back, shows the performer, who steps out. The lighting is that of the usual stage moon, with a little blue tint in it, to hide the movement caused by the sliding of the glass.

Soo baffled his brother illusionists and the public with his favourite mystery, "The Girl and the Dominoes." The effect of the dominoes illusion is as follows: The conjurer stacks a number of solid dominoes of a giant size on the table, and his assistant comes on and steps into a large box on the stage. The magician has a large square tube lowered over the dominoes, and when it is lifted, the woman is seen on the table. Going to the box, the magician shows it full of dominoes.

The dominoes on the table are solid pieces of wood. The lower part of the table is made of wickerwork, and the audience can see through it. To prove this fact, the conjurer can hold a light behind the table.

A large crescent-shaped piece is cut out of the back of the table, and the tube that covers the dominoes is fitted with a flap door. After the light has been shown behind the table, black blinds are drawn down by an assistant beneath the stage, thus forming a complete "cover" from the top of the table to the stage. Behind the table, in the space left by the piece cut out of the table, is a trap. After the tube is placed over the dominoes, the assistant gets up through the trap, removes the dominoes by taking them through the flap door in the tube, and then allows the girl to step into the empty tube.

The young woman gets clear of the box on the table because there is a hole in the bottom of the box and another in the stage. The box is arranged on the principle of the well-known drawer box, which can be shown either empty or full at the will of the conjurer. The dominoes shown at the end of the trick in the box are dummy ones, made of canvas and springs. All the dominoes, in a compressed condition, were kept at the top of the box when the girl first got into it. After the young woman has been shown on the



table, the conjurer pulls out the drawer of the box in such a way that he also draws out the dominoes which have been concealed in the box.

One turn of the knob in the drawer of the box operates a small catch, which enables the conjurer to do this, and the drawer is then shown apparently full of dominoes.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ROMANTIC STORY OF CARL HERTZ

**C**ARL HERTZ will be remembered as one of the greatest American magicians of all time. The story of his rise to fame is as romantic as any fairy story from Grimm, and is a triumph of pluck and perseverance. Carl's determination to succeed carried him through a thousand troubles, and eventually enabled him to reach the foremost rank of his profession.

His real name was Louis Morgenstein, and he was born of Jewish parents about sixty-nine years ago in San Francisco. His father owned a dry-goods store in one of the meaner parts of the town, and was determined that his son should be in the same trade. Carl, however, had other ideas. He had decided to become a magician.

Curiously enough, it was not until he had seen a conjuring performance by the Great Hermann that Carl's thoughts definitely turned towards magic. But that one performance had so impressed him that he decided then and there to change his vocation.

His first step was to learn a few tricks. This he did without any professional tuition, and practised so assiduously that in a very short while he felt confident that he could present a quite passable public performance. But now he was faced with his greatest difficulty. Who would engage him ?

This was only one of the many problems which beset him. His father, having sold up his own business, put Carl out as assistant at a neighbouring stores. From this position he was sacked for demonstrating conjuring tricks during business hours, and he lost other good posts for the same reason.

His parents became much alarmed at his continual

failures, and threatened that, unless he could put his mind to his business, all his conjuring apparatus would be destroyed. This threat they afterwards carried out.

Carl's first appearance on the stage (as an amateur) was a dismal failure. All his tricks went wrong, and his stage fright was so obvious that the audience hooted him off the platform. In one trick, where he had to fire a revolver, he lost his nerve entirely, and fired a weapon containing a live cartridge. The bullet clipped the ear of a man standing in the wings, and it was only by a miracle that the young conjurer did not stand a trial for manslaughter. As it was, he vowed he would never again appear in public.

But a few months later he was offered a professional engagement which, against his parents' wishes, he decided to accept. He joined a touring company bound for the towns of Southern California. The tour lasted exactly two days. The manager absconded, and Carl was forced to pawn his gold cuff-links in order to pay his fare back to San Francisco.

This was a bad start, but there was worse to follow. In a short while he received another offer, this time from a well-known manager who was sending a company to tour the mining towns. Carl signed up the contract, and set off for Petaluma, where the show was due to open. To his utter astonishment he found only two actors and an actress waiting to receive him. The manager told him that other artists were on their way, and handed him several sheets of closely written manuscript.

"What's this?" asked Carl.

"Your part. We're doing *H.M.S. Pinafore*," was the short reply.

Carl gasped open-mouthed.

"But hang it all," he protested, "I'm a conjurer."

"Rubbish! You don't know anything about magic, so you may as well play opera instead."

"I can't sing a note! I absolutely refuse."

"Listen." The manager dismissed his protest with an airy wave of the hand. "You either play the part of Dick Deadeye, or else start walking home. Please yourself." Carl was almost "broke," and had no option.

The performance, which had been widely advertised as "A Special Show by Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pinafore* Company," was a fiasco. University students attended in force, and when they realised that four artists were attempting to play every part in the opera, there was almost a riot. They booed, made cat-calls, and eventually started throwing eggs. After several attempts to gain a hearing the actors retired, and the curtain was rung down. The next day the company returned to San Francisco.

Bitterly disappointed, Carl was forced to return to the dry-goods trade. He surprised his parents by working exceptionally hard, and they had hopes that he would settle down and lead the normal life of a business man. In reality he was saving to pay his fare to Kansas City, where he was determined to try his luck as a single turn. In the meantime, he was giving conjuring performances at private houses and charity shows, and was gaining confidence and skill. When he had saved sufficient money, he packed up his apparatus, and started on the two thousand mile journey to the west.

For eleven days he suffered the worst discomforts imaginable. The emigrant train which he boarded was dirty and smelly, and as he was travelling in the height of summer, the conditions became nearly unbearable. His food consisted of canned meats and vegetables, which his mother had thoughtfully put into a hamper.

"That journey was the worst experience of my life," he told me forty years afterwards. "Even though it was so long ago, it remains a vivid nightmare. I don't know how I endured it."

When he arrived at his destination he jumped from the train and had a hurried wash, his first since leaving San Francisco. Then after a meal which he ate so quickly that he was troubled with indigestion for a week afterwards, he went to the best hotel in the town, and reserved a room.

"My luggage is being sent on in due course," he explained to the suspicious booking clerk.

That same evening he was lounging outside the hotel entrance when he noticed a young man in shirt sleeves giving instructions to another man who was dressing the

windows of an adjoining shop, known as "The Boston One Price Clothing Store." Carl, who felt badly in need of human companionship, started a conversation, and almost before he realised it, he had told the other of his theatrical ambitions, and of the many disappointments which had come his way.

"So you want to get on at the Théâtre Comique?" asked the shop assistant, who had introduced himself as Hano. "Well, I guess you'll have to wait a while. The theatre is being repaired, and won't be finished for another three weeks."

Carl whistled.

"That's bad," he remarked. "I'm staying at the best hotel in the town, and haven't enough money to pay for one week, let alone three."

"That's all right," returned Hano. "You clear out of that hotel right now. I can fix you up until your engagement starts. I happen to have taken a liking to you, and I reckon you'll make a success. Get your luggage sent along to my rooms."

Carl was not slow to take advantage of his new friend's kindness. He straightway handed in his notice at the hotel, and moved his luggage and his precious bundle of tricks to a small room at the back of the clothing store. had it not been for Hano's generosity, more likely than not he would have returned home, and have finished his days behind the shop counters which he hated so much.

On the following morning the young conjurer set out to visit the manager of the Théâtre Comique.

"I'm Carl Hertz, the great conjurer," he said by way of introduction. "I believe you're reopening in three weeks. I'll hang on if you care to engage me for a week."

The manager smiled thoughtfully.

"So you're a great conjurer, are you? Well, I've never heard of you. Nor has anyone else I daresay. Let's see what you can do."

Carl gave a demonstration, and was relieved to observe that the manager seemed impressed.

"That's enough," said the great man. "What's your price?"

"Sixty dollars a week."

"That's absurd. I may pay you thirty."

"That's equally absurd. As a sacrifice, I can come down to fifty."

"Far too high."

But at last everything was arranged amicably. Carl was engaged for one week at forty dollars, a figure which was then considered excellent payment. He filled in the three weeks before his engagement by doing various odd jobs in the "Boston One Price Clothing Store." On one occasion he was allowed to dress the window, and this he did with such success that the proprietor begged him to give up the idea of stage life, offering him an excellent salary as chief window dresser to the firm. Needless to say, Carl declined with thanks.

His performance met with extraordinary success, and the manager was so delighted that he extended the contract for a further fortnight. Meanwhile the conjurer wrote to agents in all parts of the United States, enclosing his programme and several Press cuttings in praise of his Kansas City performance. As a result, he obtained further engagements which lasted for another twelve months.

In 1884, when he had become a popular figure in America, Carl decided to visit England. In July he sailed for Liverpool, with the intention of remaining a few months. Actually he stopped three years. Strangely enough, the Liverpool managers would not look at him, although he assured them he had definitely established himself as one of America's leading magicians. So, more in disgust than in anger, he travelled on to Manchester, where he persuaded a manager to book him for one week on the understanding that if he were a failure there was to be no payment.

His performance was well received, and he was engaged for a further fortnight. Flushed with success, he came to London, and, as news of his northern triumph had already trickled south, he had no difficulty in obtaining further bookings.

It was at this time that Beautier de Kolta was astonishing audiences at the Trocadero with his celebrated "Vanishing Lady" illusion. This trick was different from

anything that had been seen before, and was the talk of London. Anxious not to miss anything which might be of use to him, Carl saw de Kolta's performance, and came away greatly impressed.

He altered a few of the details of the "Vanishing Lady," renamed it, and used it as his own trick. He created a profound sensation in all the towns he visited, and within a comparatively short space of time he found himself famous. That, in brief, is the romantic story of his rise to fame.

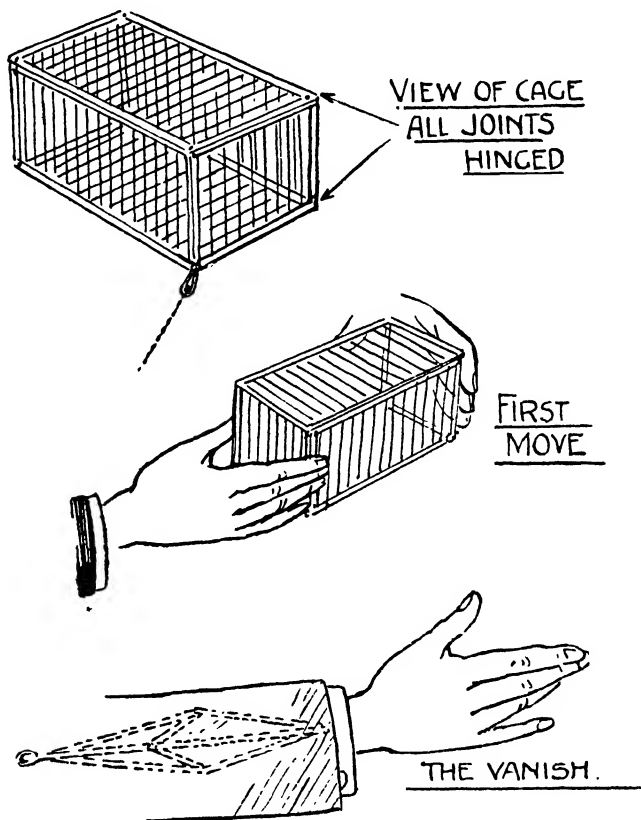
For nearly twenty years he remained the undisputed king of vaudeville magicians, and it was not until Horace Goldin first appeared here, at the beginning of this century, that the American's position was seriously challenged. Hertz saw Goldin's performance, and realised that he had now a serious rival. He became panic-stricken, and decided to alter the whole of his programme. From that moment he seemed to lose all his old artistry and showmanship.

He purchased a number of new illusions from Basch, a well-known German manufacturer. This was a great mistake. Clever mechanic though he was, Basch was no inventor, and obtained the ideas for his illusions from the programme of the best Continental performers.

Carl soon lost the reputation which had cost him so much to build. He became known as an imitator, and lost caste not only among his brother magicians, but with theatrical managers as well. He was content to appear at second-class theatres, and indeed, had it not been for his wonderful bird-cage trick, it is doubtful if he would have secured engagements at all.

It is not given to every magician to gain fame and fortune by his performance of a trick invented by another magician and performed by its inventor hundreds of times in London, but that is precisely what Carl Hertz did. He will be remembered by magicians and the public as the man who used to do the "Vanishing Bird-Cage," but he was not the inventor of the trick. It was invented by Beautier de Kolta, a very clever magician who originated a number of excellent tricks. Opinions will probably differ as to whether the "Vanishing Bird-Cage" should be considered

an excellent trick—for reasons which will be apparent when the secret is given away—but the fact remains that although de Kolta had invented the trick and had presented it many times at the old Egyptian Hall—he appeared there in Maskelyne's entertainment (then Maskelyne and Cooke's)—it was Carl Hertz who “made” the trick with the public.



The trick was presented in the following way. The magician, standing in the centre of the stage and as close to the footlights as possible (if the “run-down” was in the centre he would stand on that), held a small cage between his two hands. A live canary was in the cage. The performer would give one or two upward movements with his



hands. The cage had vanished ! He would then go to the wings for a moment and bring back a live canary to show that the bird had not been injured by the performance.

The cage was collapsible. Slight pressure on two corners diagonally opposite caused it to assume the shape of a diamond. Attached to one corner of the cage was a strong cord which passed up under the performer's shirt sleeve, across his back and was fastened on to his other arm. The length of the cord was so adjusted that he could just manage to hold the cage between his two hands when his arms were bent, but directly he extended his arms out straight the cord carried the collapsed cage up his sleeve.

Although Carl Hertz had his shirts and coats made with very large sleeves, and although he took the precaution of having most of the "wires" of the cage made of thin strands of rubber, it is to be feared that many a canary suffered through this trick. When that happened the bird which Hertz afterwards brought on to the stage was not the one which the audience had seen in the cage. There were times, of course, when the bird, being in the centre of the "diamond" when the cage collapsed, was not injured in any way, but often it was killed or sadly mutilated, although this was a fact which Hertz stoutly denied.

The public of to-day would not tolerate the performance of a trick which might involve cruelty to a bird, and when this trick is now presented the bird in the cage is always a dummy. The trick is equally effective.

As the cage was always concealed under the magician's shirt sleeve after it had vanished from his hands, Carl Hertz was able to remove his coat and thus prove (?) to the audience that the cage had not been slipped up his sleeve, and certainly it had not been slipped. Anyone who cares to experiment with a piece of string tied to his left arm will see how quickly anything tied to the other end can be drawn out of sight ; it is impossible for the eye to follow the movement.

Hertz one day walked into my office with a face as long as a fiddle. It seemed, he explained, that the truth regarding the mutilated birds had leaked out, and he feared that his trick might lose its publicity value. I tried to persuade him

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### SENSATIONAL

# CHALLENGE

TO

# CARL HERTZ

BERT ADAMS, Manager,  
Olympia Music Hall,  
Shoreditch, N.E.

The Magicians' Club,  
2, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C

Dear Sir,

One of the Members of the Magicians' Club, having witnessed Mr CARL HERTZ'S Performance last night, is convinced that the bird is either killed or injured in the Bird and Cage Trick. This is considered by the Members of the above Club as a most serious offence. Unless Mr. CARL HERTZ will perform the trick with the Canary supplied by one of the Members, the Magicians' Club will have to report the matter to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Faithfully yours,

WILL GOLDSTON,  
Director and Treasurer.

**CARL HERTZ HAS ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE, AND AGREES TO GIVE**

To any Charitable Institution that Mr. WILL GOLDSTON may suggest if he fails. The Challenge will be met at the

SECOND HOUSE  
**FRIDAY, AUG. 20<sup>th</sup>**

3 Road, Stoke Newington N

A REPRODUCTION OF A THEATRE BILL ANNOUNCING WILL GOLDSTON'S CHALLENGE TO CARL HERTZ CONCERNING THE BIRD-CAGE TRICK



to drop it from his programme. He replied that he could not afford to. I thereupon suggested that I should challenge him to perform the trick in public with a canary provided by myself. If the canary were hurt, he would drop the bird-cage trick once for all. If the canary went uninjured, then so much the better for Hertz.

Hertz agreed that if he succeeded this challenge would be a tremendous "boost." Yet he was extremely apprehensive of failure. I told him that he could not have it both ways. He promised to call in within a day or two to let me know his decision. Before he had done so, I forced his hand by sending the following letter to Bert Adams, the manager of the old Olympia Music Hall in Shoreditch, at which the illusionist was then appearing.

"DEAR SIR,

One of the members of the Magicians' Club, having witnessed Mr. Carl Hertz's performance last night, is convinced that the bird is either killed or injured in the Bird and Cage Trick. This is considered by the members of the above club as a most serious offence. Unless Mr. Carl Hertz will perform the trick with the canary supplied by one of the members, the Magicians' Club will have to report the matter to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Faithfully yours,

WILL GOLDSTON."

As I expected, Hertz indignantly denied the charge ; and, ingeniously making a virtue of necessity, agreed to pay £50 to any charity I might name in the event of his failure. Bert Adams was not slow to seize the opportunity which my challenge offered. He had a large number of bills printed in English and Hebrew, and distributed them throughout the East End. Hertz was himself a Jew and his popularity with the Jewish community was immense.

The test took place during the second house of a Friday night, and the audience was solid for Hertz. When I walked on to the stage, accompanied by a committee of seven from the Magicians' Club, we were received by a round of booing, hissing, and cat-calls lasting a full three minutes. Even

then, it was only through a mute appeal by Hertz that I was given a hearing.

Now I had gone to some trouble to obtain a canary of distinctive marking, for I knew that if the bird were to suffer injury, Hertz was not above substituting a canary of his own. When he saw my little black and yellow bird, with a silver tag attached to one of its legs, Carl was very much perturbed.

"Where did you buy it?" he whispered in my ear. "Where did you buy it?" A little later he whispered: "I thought you were my friend." Some weeks afterwards he confided to me that his chief assistant had hurried from the theatre to scour the notorious Club Row for a bird of similar markings. But the hour was late, and the bird-fanciers' shops had closed.

Hertz made a long and rambling speech from the stage. I could see that he was very nervous, and playing for time. "Come along, Carl," I said to him. "It's now or never." Taking the bird from me, he inserted it in the cage. His hands were shaking, and, to make matters worse, the bird, perhaps from fright or indifference, squatted on the floor against the bars. In this position it was liable to injury.

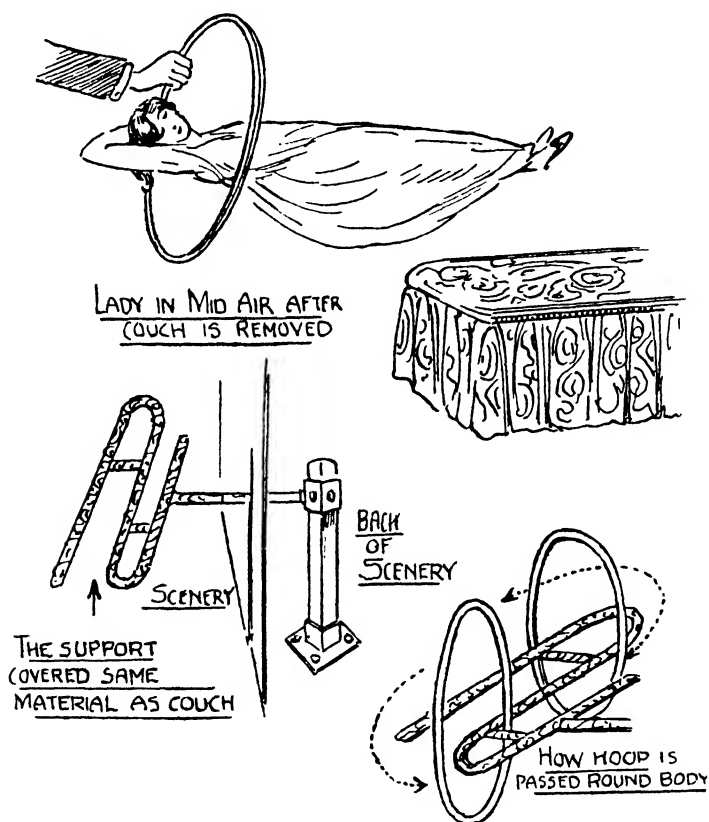
By dint of shaking the cage, Hertz edged the bird towards the centre. For the fraction of a second, it rested there, and then the bird and cage were gone, and Hertz was holding out his empty hands to the audience. It was a beautifully timed action.

Hertz's confidence returned to the full, and he won a laugh against me by reaching out a hand, and producing the canary from behind my ear. I identified it, and the committee testified to its uninjured condition. As we left the stage, the booing and hissing broke out anew. In spite of Hertz's triumph, I foresaw trouble. We left the theatre singly, and for my part I disguised myself in a cap and coat borrowed from a stage hand.

Nor is that quite the end of the story. Hertz was so pleased with his success, he came round to my office on the following day and thanked me for my trouble. Later he assured me that the challenge had been worth no less than £10,000 to him.

## THE ROMANTIC STORY OF CARL HERTZ 41

One of the favourite illusions of this magician was "The Floating Lady." A board was placed on the back of two chairs. A lady assistant reclined on the board. The chairs were then removed, but the board, with the lady on it, remained in its place. The magician then passed a hoop over the board and, making a few passes with his hand

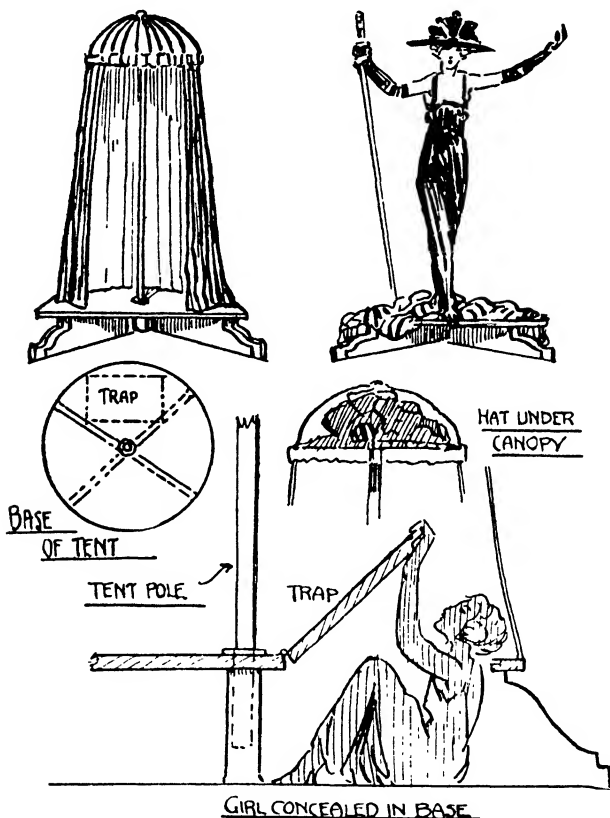


over the lady, caused her to float upwards and then descend again. The chairs were put back in their places and eventually the board came back to its original position on the back of the chairs. Then Carl Hertz would hand the lady off the board to show that there was no concealed apparatus anywhere.

This illusion was always performed near the back curtain

## 42 SECRETS OF FAMOUS ILLUSIONISTS

of the stage—the back cloth, as it is usually called. After the lady had taken up her position on the board, a rod was pushed out from the curtain and fitted by the magician to the board. The rest was easy. The hoop used was a very large one. The performer would pass it along the board until he got to the rod at the back and then he would slant



the hoop so that it would go over the other end of the board.

He then reversed the movements and brought the hoop back to its original position, and only a magician in the audience ever realised that the hoop had not been passed right over the board fairly, from one end to the other. It has been truly said that the best tricks and illusions are the easiest.

Another favourite illusion of Carl Hertz's was a very pretty one entitled "The Merry Widow." In this illusion the performer first drew attention to a small circular platform on the stage. In the centre of the platform a pole was fitted and on this a bathing tent was hung. The curtains were drawn for a moment and then opened, disclosing a tall lady wearing an enormous hat (of the kind known as the "Merry Widow," when the illusion was invented) and carrying a long stick.

The illustration shows how the lady was concealed at the back of the platform ; she was able to get into the tent by opening the trap in the platform. The hat was concealed in the top of the canopy and the stick which the lady held was the tent pole. Simple though the explanation seems, this illusion was always very effective.



## CHAPTER III

### THE GREAT LAFAYETTE—THE MOST HATED MAGICIAN

**L**AFAYETTE was the most hated magician that ever lived. This is strange when one recalls that it was he who established the first-class illusionist as an artist worthy of a high salary.

He was unsociable to a point of rudeness, and it was for this reason that he was universally disliked. His constant refusals to meet his brother conjurers, both here and in America, made him so intensely unpopular that he was greeted everywhere with the most utter and open contempt.

I have always been convinced that Lafayette was too scared to meet his fellow illusionists. His knowledge of true conjuring was negligible, and, rather than demonstrate his appalling ignorance of the profession of which he was so eminent a member, he preferred to keep his company to himself.

As an illusionist he was wonderful, and as a showman I rank him in the same class as Houdini and John Nevil Maskelyne. But the ability to stage a sensational illusion does not necessitate a knowledge of real magic. It was this knowledge which Lafayette lacked.

He was a mechanical illusionist, pure and simple. He was clever enough to build an entirely different programme from any other magician of his time, and it was in this manner he made his reputation. "It must be spectacular," was his motto, and well he lived up to it. His chief aim was to produce an attractive show, and it may be said that he used magic simply as a means to that end. His act was typified by gorgeous scenery, showy curtains, and loud and stirring music.

Lafayette has been called eccentric. That is putting it mildly. I considered him quite mad. He drilled his

assistants like soldiers, and demanded that they should salute him in the street. He bought a diamond collar for his dog. He paid even the smallest accounts by cheque, no matter if the debt was only a penny.

His dog "Beauty" was his greatest weakness. It was this animal whose portrait was on all the magician's cheques and theatrical contracts. A special bathroom was built for the dog at Lafayette's house in Torrington Square, and at night-time the animal was served with a regular table d'hôte meal, complete from soup to sweets. "Beauty's" portrait hung outside the house with this inscription beneath: "The more I see of men, the more I love my dog."

In many ways The Great Lafayette was original. There never has been—and probably never will be—another illusionist of his type, a brilliantly successful magician with very little real knowledge of magic. But in his case ignorance was no handicap, for Lafayette possessed an extraordinary gift which is not enjoyed even by some of the fairly successful magicians—the gift of knowing exactly what kind of entertainment the public like. He never produced a failure.

Curiously enough, however, it was with a small, simple illusion, devised by himself, that Lafayette first conquered audiences in London. People came to see his show because it was original, a fine spectacle, novel in every way. But it was the little illusion, which occupied only a few minutes, that set them talking. Indeed, after the first performance it became the talk of London, and the public flocked to see it.

Any other magician would have been secretly amused at the interest of the general public in so simple an illusion, but, as I have said, The Great Lafayette was not like any other magician. Although by no means a morose man—he was seldom amused—he took life seriously. When he found that he had achieved a most remarkable success with an illusion that he had built at the cost of a pound or two, he merely "kept himself to himself," as was his custom, and went on with his work. He enlarged and improved his show, made it still more brilliant and attractive.

Lafayette, it must be remembered, was the first magician to discover the taste of the public for spectacular magic. The bigger and the more elaborate the spectacle, the more it appealed to this wonderful showman; he took full advantage of every opportunity of having a brilliant stage setting and a rich display of costumes, and it pleased him to appear for a short time during his great show as an Egyptian magician, wearing a magnificent robe.

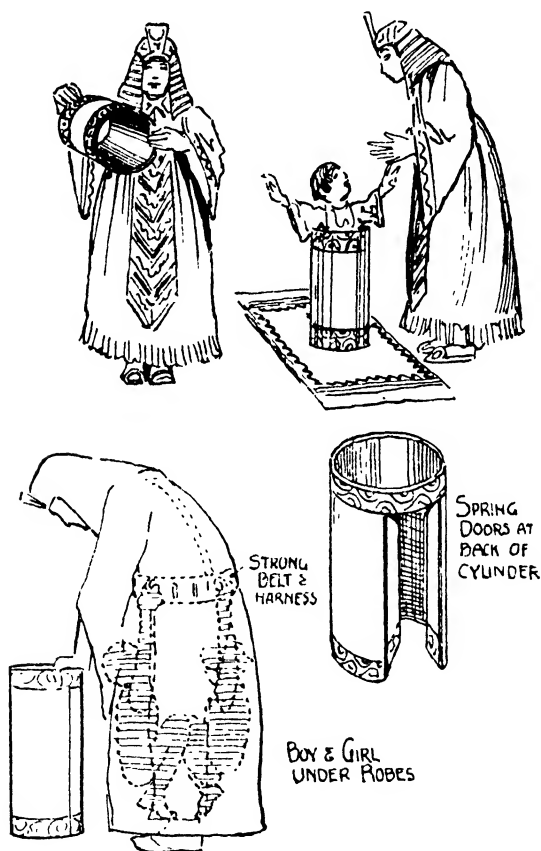
At that time the London Hippodrome had an arena in addition to the stage, the ring being often used for circus turns. Lafayette hit upon the ingenious idea of giving his magical performance in the arena, and in that way showed people that no traps were used. Thus, without saying a word as to its merits, he made his illusion appear far more effective and a far greater attraction than it would have been had he performed it on the stage.

The effect which so captured the imagination of the public was presented in the following manner. Lafayette, clad in a striking Egyptian robe, walked slowly to the centre of the arena. Standing there he was surrounded by the audience. He held up a large cylinder and turned it so that everyone could see that it was empty. Putting the cylinder down in front of him, he made mysterious passes over and around it. Sometimes he would lift the cylinder again and again, as though to show that the magic spell had been ineffective, for Lafayette was a master in the art of working an audience up to a state of excitement and enthusiasm. At last, with a swift movement, he raised the cylinder for the last time, and the audience saw a living child standing there. The child walked to one side and the cylinder was replaced. Lafayette made passes towards the child, who skipped away from him and returned.

People who were looking at the illusion for the first time thought that it was over, and the applause was always tremendous. The magician raised his hands for silence, made passes again over the cylinder and raised it, disclosing a second child. Then the applause of the huge audience was unchecked, and the illusionist had to remain for some moments in the arena to acknowledge it.

It was a daring illusion, but Lafayette was a daring

magician—his methods, devised by himself, would have frightened any other magician. On paper the explanation of this illusion seems absurdly simple, but one has to remember the striking effect it produced, and, after all, the effect is all that a magician needs to consider.



Lafayette produced this illusion in the following way. His walk to the centre of the arena was slow, partly because he was acting the part of an Egyptian magician—for a time all his movements were slow and deliberate. But there was another reason why he walked slowly—the two children he was to produce were clinging to a belt under his robe.

The cylinder was not quite so simple as it appeared to be ; it was really in two pieces joined together with spring hinges, at a spot about two feet from the overlapping end. Thus, when Lafayette wished to produce the first child, all he had to do was to bring the cylinder close to his flowing robe and open it at the spring-hinged part. His robe hid the gap, and at that moment he leaned over it slightly ; no one could see directly behind the cylinder. Only for a second or two was the opening made ; then the spring hinges took the overlapping part of the cylinder back to its former place and—the rest was showmanship.

It may seem incredible that the magician could have achieved such an astonishing effect in so easy a way, but that, nevertheless, is the secret of the illusion.

At times, when Lafayette was presenting this illusion on a stage, he would add a touch of comedy and increase the effect. After the first child had been produced and the cylinder removed, the audience saw what appeared to be the door of a trap sticking up in the stage. Lafayette's acting, as he pretended to be horrified by this apparent mistake, was masterly. Then he would go quietly over to the door and kick it away—it was only a light dummy put there for effect !

Thus the audience were again convinced, even when the illusion was presented on a stage, that no trap had been used, and they were left to puzzle in vain over the problem of how Lafayette conjured up two living children from nowhere.

Another of Lafayette's illusions which was always popular was "The Girl in the Bath."

A bathroom, with one of the sides curtained, was erected on the stage. Lafayette drew the curtains on one side and the audience saw a girl in the bath. The girl screamed, Lafayette advanced and threw a bath towel over her head, and for a few seconds she remained there, under the towel. Then the illusionist suddenly whisked the towel away. The girl had vanished !

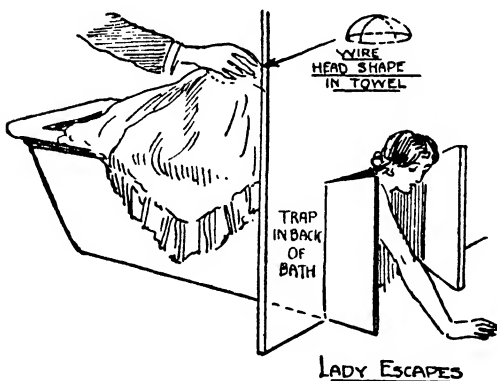
The bath was on short legs, and the audience could see beneath it. No one ever imagined that there could be another means of exit, namely, right through one end ;



A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED PICTURE OF LAFAYETTE



but it was in that way, under cover of the towel, that the girl escaped—through one end of the bath and through little doors in the scenery. The towel had a wire frame concealed in it to represent the girl's head during the few moments occupied by her escape.

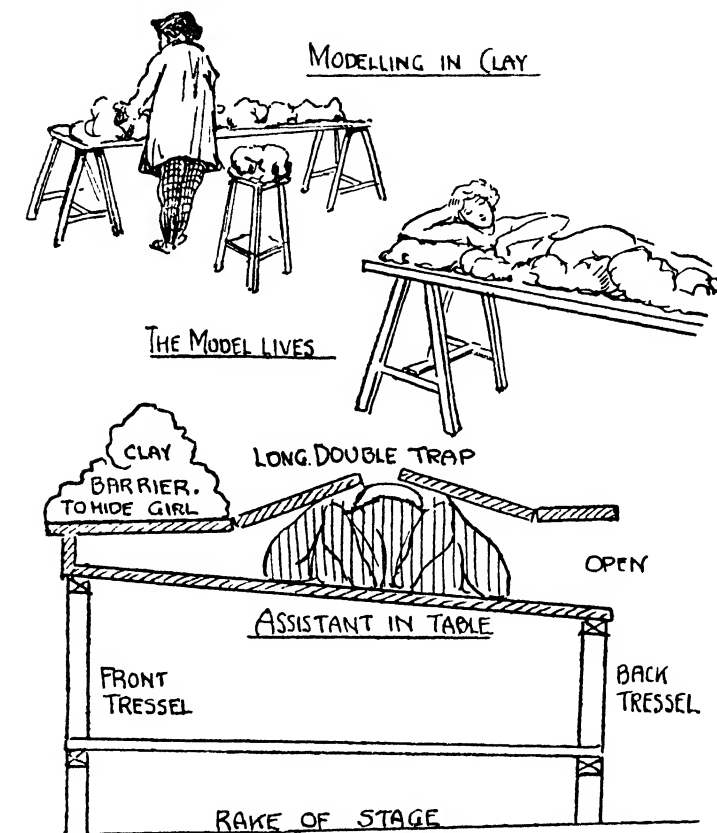


A favourite illusion, which specially appealed to Lafayette because it gave him so many opportunities for showmanship, was "The Sculptor." In the centre of the stage was a small table bearing lumps of modelling clay. The magician, dressed as a sculptor, began to model the clay into the form of a girl, and eventually the figure came to life.

Here again a very simple method was used. The girl



was concealed in the table, the top of which was fitted with a sliding trap. The accompanying illustration is purposely exaggerated in order to show the working of the illusion ; it was not necessary to have such a large space for the concealment of the girl.



While the girl was slowly working her way out to the top of the table, Lafayette stood in front of the table, and lumps of clay were piled up at the sides. The girl wore "dead" white tights, and the stage lighting was specially arranged to add to the effectiveness of the illusion, which puzzled and pleased all audiences.

After the girl had worked her way on the table, Lafayette continued his modelling for some time, and even the

favoured few who knew how the illusion was worked, were fascinated by the showmanship of the magician—looking down on the table, one had difficulty in distinguishing the modelled clay from the living flesh.

Perhaps one reason why this illusion had a special attraction for Lafayette was because he was, first and foremost, an artist. He began his working career as a scenic painter in America, and he never lost his eye for an artistic effect. How he came to adopt magic as a profession I never discovered.

Magicians all over the world have good reason to be grateful to this illusionist, for he was the creator of large salaries ; he opened the eyes of music-hall managers to the drawing value of a good show.

It was Lafayette's custom, when making arrangements to appear at a hall in which he had not previously performed, to demand two things—a fortnight's engagement and a salary of £1,000 a week. To the first of these demands he always rigidly adhered ; he knew the value of his show, and so was well aware that it would serve to attract audiences for at least a fortnight. In this way he also economised, for the expense of transporting his show from town to town was enormous.

If a manager demurred at paying him a salary of £1,000 a week, the great man would say : " Very well. Tell me what your highest takings have been for the house." Books would be produced, and the manager would point to a week in which there had been a Bank Holiday. Lafayette would then guarantee similar figures, on the condition that he was allowed to have all the takings above the record.

The magician knew just what he was doing. The manager naturally consented to such a plan ; whatever happened he was certain of two weeks' record business. But the plan worked so well for Lafayette that, when he went to a hall for the second time, the manager always preferred to pay him the salary he asked, namely, £2,000 for his fortnight's work.

Strangely enough, this remarkable showman never described himself on his posters in any way. To the public

he was simply "The Great Lafayette," and if any performer ever deserved the title "The Great," he did.

He did everything on a large, spectacular scale. He employed a small army of assistants all drilled in military fashion, so that the whole performance went "like clock-work." He had also his own band, and, merely to provide an excuse for the appearance on the stage of the gorgeously uniformed musicians, he gave a series of imitations of famous musical conductors. He chose all the music for his show himself, his object being to work his audience up to a pitch of enthusiasm. To crown all, he always made his final appearance on horseback.

Although much of his show was brilliant "make-believe," there was one little detail about which there was no deception. The affection which Lafayette showed for his dog, "Beauty," was the real thing. The dog was his constant companion, his love, his god. At times "Beauty" figured in a very simple illusion on the stage, really because the general public had heard of Lafayette's dog and demanded to see her.

When "Beauty" was taken ill, Lafayette took her to the Royal Veterinary College for treatment, and he visited her there twice a day. His grief when she died remained with him for the rest of his life.

Strangely enough, fate willed that this superb showman should die in spectacular fashion, in a disastrous fire which broke out at the Empire Theatre, Edinburgh, on May 9th, 1911.

It has been popularly supposed that Lafayette perished in the flames because, although escape was open to him, he insisted on trying to rescue his horse. A more likely explanation is that it was his insistence on the "pass door" (the iron door leading from the stage into the auditorium) being locked during his performance that cost him his life.

It was Lafayette's invariable rule to have the pass door always locked when his performance was in progress, in order that no intruder should discover the secrets of his illusions. It was a foolish stipulation and led to tragedy, for there is little doubt that, when the fire broke out on the

stage, Lafayette rushed to the pass door to make good his escape, forgetting for the moment that it was locked by his own orders. Too late then to make his way to the other exit, he would find himself trapped by flames.

The mystery that always surrounded this performer persisted even after his death. The strangest rumours were spread abroad. It was said that he had escaped, and that, for reasons known only to himself, he wished to hide the fact that he was alive. Unfortunately all such rumours were baseless. The fire at the Empire, Edinburgh, rang down the curtain on Lafayette's last show.

Unlike most magicians, Lafayette had practically no personality when he was away from his work. He was of rather slender build, slightly under the average height, and so little known to the general public that he could always pass in and out of any hall in which he was appearing without being recognised. He was alive to the value of all the advertisement he could get for his show, but he shunned advertisement of himself. Protesting that he was not a magician, and knew nothing about magic, he preferred to be simply "The Great Lafayette," and it is by that name and title he will always be remembered.

## CHAPTER IV

### MASKELYNE AND THE PSYCHO SENSATION

**W**AS John Nevil Maskelyne a genius? Yes—but not a magical genius. How then, you might ask, did he make his name famous throughout the world as England's greatest illusionist?

It was showmanship, that indefinable quality without which the cleverest performance will be a failure, and which has turned many a mediocre production into a startling success. John Nevil Maskelyne was a showman to his finger tips.

He was not, strictly speaking, a conjurer. Although his manipulation of the spinning bowls was extremely expert, he specialised mainly in mechanical illusions, and it was on these effects that he built up his great reputation. He understood the great power of the Press, and, like Houdini in later years, he did anything to bring his name before the public.

He invented a great number of clever illusions, and was skilled in most matters appertaining to machinery. This is not to be wondered at, for he first went into business as a clockmaker at Cheltenham. In those early days his greatest friend was Cooke, a tailor's apprentice, and both of them studied magic as a spare-time hobby.

It was a pure accident which led these two young men to consider the possibilities of becoming professional magicians, for, although they were both keen amateurs, neither considered himself sufficiently expert to earn a living by the art.

At that time the Davenport Brothers were at the height of their fame, and their visit to Cheltenham excited much interest. They were then performing their celebrated

“spirit-séance,” which many people believed was a genuine exhibition of psychic phenomena.

Both the performers were bound to chairs, their wrists were tied, and their hands filled with flour. They were put inside a cabinet, and between them was placed a stool on which stood a glass of water, a number of musical instruments, a board, a hammer, and some nails. The lights of the theatre were extinguished, thus plunging the stage into darkness.

Less than a minute afterwards a distinct sound of hammering was heard to come from the cabinet. The musical instruments were played in expert fashion, and then silence reigned again. When the lights were turned up, it was found that the nails had been driven into the board, the musical instruments had been disturbed, and the water in the glass had vanished. The performers had apparently not moved, for their wrists were still tied, and the flour in their hands was not spilled. But their coats had been turned inside out.

Maskelyne had no idea how the trick was done, but a faint ray of light thrown on to the stage from an uncurtained window gave him the secret. The Davenports had ordered that the window should be covered, but half way through the “séance” the curtain slipped down unnoticed. This unforeseen accident permitted Maskelyne to watch the Davenports’ movements. He saw them slip their ropes, carefully place the flour in their pockets, and remove their coats. They played on the instruments, hammered the nails to the board, drank the water, and put their coats on inside out. When the “séance” was completed, they took the flour again from their pockets, and replaced their hands into the sliding loops of the ropes. This insight into the working of a professional illusion set Maskelyne thinking.

Shortly afterwards he decided to become a professional magician, and Cooke agreed to become his partner. The latter played only an assistant’s part on the stage, but he had charge of all the costumes and sceneries in the act. This was in 1865, but it was not until eight years afterwards that they accumulated sufficient capital to enable them to take a lease of the St. James’s Hall, London.

In those eight years in the provinces, Maskelyne had learnt much. He was as yet an unknown name in England, but was beginning to develop those gifts for showmanship which were later to make him world-famous. His idea was to run for two or three months in London and then return to the provinces as "Maskelyne—The Great London Magician." But he and Cooke made so much money from their short stay at the St. James's Hall, that he decided to take a long lease of the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly.

In this he showed extreme cleverness, for this theatre was ideally suited for a magical entertainment. It had a quaint, mystic atmosphere which I have never encountered elsewhere, and by calling it "England's Home of Mystery," Maskelyne did much to heighten this strange effect.

Maskelyne made his name, not so much by his own performances, as by those of the great conjurers whom he engaged to assist him at the Egyptian Hall. Such men as Devant, Paul Valadon, de Kolta, and Charles Morritt did more to build up the reputation of the theatre than either of the two proprietors. For Maskelyne, it must be said he had a friendly and intimate manner of putting over his illusions, a fatherly style which appealed immensely to his old-fashioned audiences.

His most famous trick was the celebrated box escape, and he offered £500 to the man who could discover the secret. Two magical mechanics claimed to have done so, but Maskelyne refused to pay the money. A court case ensued which was eventually taken to the House of Lords. Maskelyne knew that the publicity he received was worth far more than the money he had been forced to part with. I believe this box was destroyed on Maskelyne's death.

The libel case which Archdeacon Colley brought against Maskelyne will still be remembered by many. The Archdeacon stated that he had attended a spiritualistic séance in which he had seen the form of a woman materialised from a man's side. Although he secretly had a great respect for Spiritualism, Maskelyne publicly derided it, thereby gaining a wonderful free advertisement. On this occasion, he stated he could produce by mechanical means the effect seen by Archdeacon Colley, and added a few



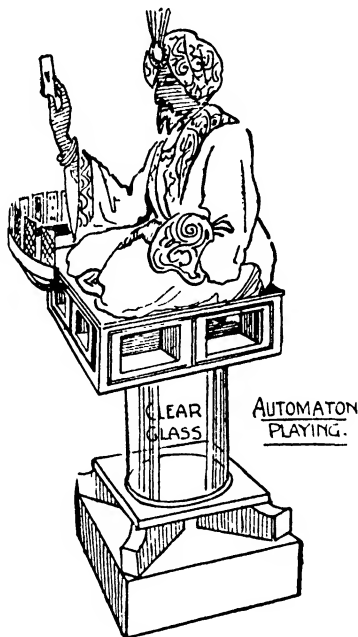
THE LATE CAPTAIN CLIVE MASKELYNE





words which were a gross libel on the famous prelate. And, although Maskelyne again lost his case, he gained an enormous amount of publicity from the Press.

Curiously enough, all Maskelyne's business ventures outside magic were complete failures. On the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee procession, he undertook to erect a certain number of stands. It so happened that the



procession did not take the route anticipated, and he lost every farthing he had put into the venture.

In 1905 the lease of the Egyptian Hall expired, and Maskelyne moved to the present headquarters of the family, St. George's Hall. He opened with a play called *The Race*, which was a disastrous failure. He was not in the least disheartened, and, by returning to his illusions, soon attracted the same crowded houses he had drawn at the Egyptian Hall. On the death of Cooke, he went into partnership with David Devant. This proved even more successful than the first combination.

John Nevil Maskelyne died in 1917, and his descendants

are still carrying on the family traditions at St. George's Hall. The name of Maskelyne will be known and honoured as long as magic exists.

One of Maskelyne's most famous illusions, which was a sensation at the time, was "Psycho," a figure that played whist with members of the audience.

"Psycho" was a wonderful draw, because the little figure seemed to be completely isolated. Under the figure, which sat with crossed legs, was a small box of machinery. The model was always given out for examination. Then a small stool, under which the audience could see, was placed on the stage. On the stool was placed a large glass cylinder, and on the top of the cylinder rested Psycho.

In front of Psycho was a small crescent-shaped frame in which cards could be placed. Three members of the audience were asked to take a hand at whist. The cards were shuffled and dealt in the usual way. Psycho's cards were placed in the frame, so that he apparently saw all of them. When it was his turn to play, the figure would raise its right arm, the hand would come down over a card, and the fingers would take it out of the frame. Maskelyne then took the card from the figure and held it up so that everyone could see the card Psycho had played.

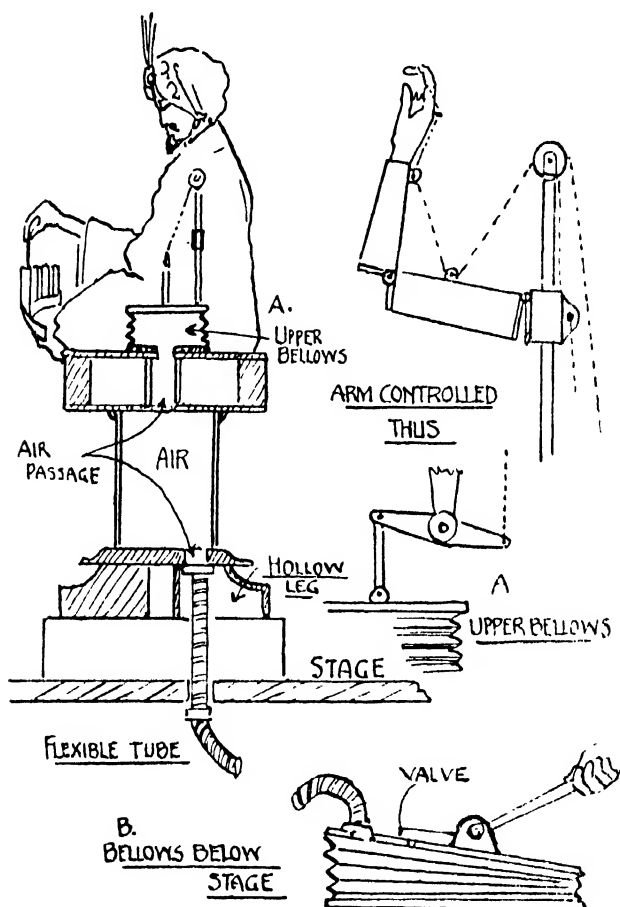
The whole secret of this marvellous performance was compressed air.

The cards of the players were known to the magician, who communicated by code with his assistant below the stage. The assistant then proceeded to actuate a pair of bellows which drove air through a tube through one of the legs of the base of the glass cylinder, which was thus filled with air. There was also an air passage in the top of the glass cylinder, and the air was driven through a space between the woodwork on the top of the pedestal, and thus into another pair of bellows concealed in the clothing of the figure.

This pair of bellows was connected by a series of levers and springs constructed to move the arm and hand of the figure. By the amount of pressure imparted to the air through the two bellows, a series of movements took place

## MASKELYNE AND THE PSYCHO SENSATION 59

in the arm of the model so that the arm could pass over the cards in the rack before it stopped where the assistant intended it to stop, bend, and pick up the card. The assistant had before him a dial connected with the bellows,



which told him when the hand of the figure had reached the right position indicated to him by the magician's signal.

Psycho was not entirely Maskelyne's own invention, but he made all the mechanism for it. During the performance, Psycho smoked a cigarette.

## CHAPTER V

### HOUDINI AS I KNEW HIM

**A**LTHOUGH Mr. J. C. Cannell has dealt most adequately with Houdini in his fascinating book *The Secrets of Houdini*, the famous escapist was so remarkable a man that there is no end to the things that might be said about him. My own friendship with Houdini extended over a period of thirty years, and I feel that few men are better qualified than myself to add to the personal record of this prince among professional deceivers.

I am never tired of writing about Houdini and apparently the public is never tired of reading about him. His was a glamour that has grown rather than faded since his death; his strength of personality was such that it has reached out far beyond the grave.

The son of a poor and overworked Jewish Rabbi, Houdini, whose family came from Hungary, was born in Appleton, Wisconsin, U.S.A., on April 6th, 1874. He died in Detroit on October 31st, 1926, at the age of fifty-two, when he had been a performer for forty-three years. His real name was Ehrich Weiss.

As a boy he was restless and alert, and the faculties which later were to make him famous were already apparent in his character.

When eleven years old, the boy Weiss obtained a job at the local locksmith's, and was soon able to pick any lock submitted to him. While he was apprenticed to this work occurred an incident which marked a significant turning-point in his career.

A young man in the town where he was apprenticed was arrested for an unimportant offence. In trying to open his handcuffs with some keys he had on him, he succeeded in

breaking a key in the lock of the handcuff. He was brought to the shop in which young Weiss was working. The police wanted the cuff opened or cut off the man's wrist.

The master locksmith set to work to open the handcuff, but while he was thus engaged the whistle blew for dinner, and he passed the job over to his apprentice Weiss, telling him to cut the handcuff off with a hacksaw.

The young man tried to carry out his instructions, and in doing so broke some half a dozen saw blades. It then occurred to the future "handcuff king" that he might be able to pick the lock of the handcuff. He succeeded in doing so, and Houdini said many years afterwards that the method he then employed contained the basic principle which he had used in opening handcuffs all over the world.

When the locksmith gave up his business, Houdini obtained work as a necktie cutter, and was thus employed for two years, distinguishing himself in his spare time as an athlete.

Strange as it may seem, Houdini would probably never have become a professional magician had he not started out as a necktie cutter, for it was in this factory that he had his first introduction to the art of conjuring.

The youth who worked on the bench next to him was interested in a small way in magic. One day he suggested to Harry that they should both go along to the Bowery to purchase a few tricks.

"Tricks!" said Houdini. "Whatever for?"

"My hobby is conjuring," was the reply. "It's great fun—you should try it."

The demonstration in the Bowery was a great success. Harry was so amazed at the apparent miracles which the salesman performed that he determined there and then to become a conjurer. That he was almost penniless did not worry him in the least. His youthful imagination was fired, and he decided that nothing on earth would stop him climbing the ladder of magical fame.

With a friend named Hayman, he started as a professional entertainer, and the pair were known as the

Houdini Brothers. The name was an adaptation, by the addition of "i," of the name of the French magician, Robert Houdin.

Houdini separated from Hayman later and his real brother, Theodore, became his partner.

The Houdini Brothers could not, however, obtain enough professional work to maintain themselves, and in the intervals between engagements found casual jobs of various kinds.

At the age of nineteen Houdini made a brief appearance as an actor, but the play was not a success and he was soon out of work again.

He went to St. Louis. The winter was bitterly cold and he had no money for firewood. Having "found" a packing-case in front of a large shop—Houdini always used to explain that this case had been discarded by its owners—he thought that he would take it home, break it up, and use it as firewood.

But there were difficulties. He did not wish to carry such a huge case through the streets, and he knew that the police would not allow him to break it up in a crowded thoroughfare. Accordingly, he devised a way of taking the case apart noiselessly. This "brain wave" was remembered in after years, and the method was used by Houdini in his great packing-case mystery.

The idea of this feat was really forced on him. He was appearing with his escape act at Essen, in Germany, and while there he visited a large linen factory. A man who was packing a case with linen to send to America recognised Houdini as the man who the day before had escaped from the local gaol. He laughingly suggested that if Houdini were packed in the case and the case nailed down he would not be able to escape.

"Oh, that would be easy," replied Houdini, and, treating the matter as a joke, he thought no more about it at the time.

But the next day, on reading the local papers, he was amazed to find that he had been publicly challenged by the proprietors of the linen factory (who probably saw the prospect of a good advertisement in doing so) to escape

from one of their packing-cases after it had been nailed down and roped.

Houdini accepted the challenge, and, using the method he had employed years before when he had wanted fire-wood to heat his room, managed to escape from the case. Naturally, the reports of this wonderful feat created a great sensation, and as they were published far and wide, they helped to build up his reputation.

But success still seemed a long way off in 1898, and things were so bad with Houdini that he almost decided to give up all thoughts of earning his living as a showman. His idea was to work by day at one of his trades—for he was really proficient in several—open a school of magic, and occupy his evenings with private entertainments. But fate decided otherwise.

While Houdini was appearing at a small hall in St. Paul, a party of managers happened to come in, and were much impressed by his performance. One of them, Mr. Martin Beck, challenged him to escape from a handcuff which he would provide. On the following day Mr. Beck bought a few pairs of handcuffs, took them to the show, and sent them on the stage.

Houdini escaped ! He had reached the first rung of the ladder to success.

Mr. Beck promptly booked Houdini for a week's engagement at a salary of £12. The rest everybody knows.

From that week Houdini never had to trouble about work ; it was provided for him—in large quantities.

Destined to become world-famous as the man who could free himself from bonds under conditions which seemed to make escape impossible, Houdini was really responsible for making such feats popular with the public ; it may be said that he devised an entirely new branch of magic.

Perhaps the general public did not know that to open a pair of ordinary handcuffs without a key is not a very difficult matter—when you know the secret. Having had the cuffs fixed on your wrists, bring the bow of one of them (the bent portion) down with a smart rap on some hard substance ; the spring will give and the cuff fly open.

I myself knew Harry Houdini before I had ever seen him.



His reputation had reached me some years before I first encountered him, and, as is the habit of magicians, we corresponded for a considerable time before he gave his first performance in this country.

Strangely enough, it was quite by accident that I first ran into him. About thirty-two years ago, I was walking down Lime Street, one of the main thoroughfares of Liverpool. It was winter time and snowing hard. As I hastened along, with my thoughts on nothing in particular, I noticed a short figure coming towards me, with coat collar turned up and head bent to the ground.

As the man got nearer, I observed that he was carrying a small dog beneath his left arm. His clothes were shabby and unkempt, and it was this fact more than anything else which caused me to stare at him with more than usual interest. To my surprise, his face was familiar.

"Excuse me," I said, grasping him by the arm. "Are you Harry Houdini?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Who are you?"

"I'm Will Goldston."

"Goldston, my dear fellow!" cried Houdini, shaking me by the hand as if I had been his lifelong friend. "This is indeed a pleasant surprise." His manner suddenly changed. "Tell me," he resumed, lowering his voice for no apparent reason, "where can I get a pair of patent leather boots?"

"Patent leather boots?"

"Sure. I've tried almost every shop in town. And then I want to find the American Bar. You must take me there."

We strolled along to a small footwear shop that was known to me, and Houdini bought the boots he required. When he had expressed full satisfaction at his purchase, I escorted him to the American Bar, wondering why he was so anxious to visit the place. I was not left long in ignorance.

When we arrived, I found that a collection was being made for the widow of a poor and unknown member of the profession. Houdini had been told of this, and had decided to give as much as he could afford. In those days



AN UNUSUAL PICTURE OF HARRY HOUDINI IN FILM WORK



he was not getting the big salary that he earned in later years, but he subscribed two pounds to the fund.

I have mentioned this somewhat insignificant incident because it was absolutely characteristic of the man—warm-hearted and generous, always willing to help a brother or sister in distress. Indeed, familiar though I was with Houdini's generosity, which he carried sometimes almost to a fault, it came as something of a surprise even to me when it was revealed in New York recently that although the magician died possessing property worth more than half a million dollars, the liabilities of the estate to-day are greater than the assets. "Over-generosity," was the explanation of his lawyer.

Later, when he told me that he himself was badly lacking in funds, I wondered what manner of man this strange Houdini could be.

As we left the American Bar, Houdini told me the story of his life—a story that could fill several volumes. "Do you know, Goldston," he said, "I have not had a decent meal for more than five years !"

"In Heaven's name, why not ?" I asked.

"In my early days I couldn't afford it, and now I'm too busy."

At first I thought Houdini was pulling my leg. As a matter of fact, it was not until some years afterwards that I realised he had told me the truth. Although he was earning a hundred pounds a week, Houdini was a starving man !

After we had walked some little way in silence—I hardly liked to call the man a liar—Houdini resumed the conversation. "Are you responsible for the display of books in the shop next to the theatre ?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "It struck me that your visit to this country would help the sale of my first book. I hired the shop window, and made a terrific splash of the whole thing."

Some months previously Houdini had given me his written consent to include the explanations of a number of his escape tricks in a book I was writing. I had had a big placard painted with the words "How Houdini does his

tricks," and had it, together with several copies of the book, placed in the shop window.

"It's a good idea, and you certainly deserve to get on," said my companion. "But it doesn't do me much good, does it?" And he smiled kindly. "You must call at my apartments to-morrow. I would like you to meet Mrs. Houdini."

The next day I called and had tea with the Houdinis. There we talked over different matters connected with our profession, and I remember advising the American to go down to the harbour and see a huge advertisement of his name. It was then that I urged him to have his name printed as "Houdini," with the Christian name "Harry" in very small type. Houdini thought this a good business idea, and eventually became known simply by his surname.

Before I left, he promised that he would write to me every week when he returned to America. He kept his promise twenty-eight years, sometimes sending me as many as three and four letters a week.

One amusing story of Houdini that I recall throws an interesting sidelight on his extraordinary character. To appreciate the full point of this little yarn, it must be remembered that I am a professional magician of many years' experience in performing and inventing, and Houdini often asked me to help and advise him with his illusions.

When the American last appeared in this country, he was engaged at the London Palladium for a fortnight at the enormous salary of £900 a week.

Before he was due to open, he informed me that he was running a "really great show." One trick in particular was a "winner," and he wanted me to be in the theatre to see it. I could clearly see what the man was driving at, for I guessed that he would be as pleased as Punch if he could mystify me as well as the rest of the audience.

As I was talking to him in his dressing-room before the performance, an assistant rapped on the door and entered.

"Well?" asked Houdini.

"It's all right, boss," came the answer. "I've fixed up those two confederates in the stalls and circle."

"You b—— fool," screamed Harry, jumping to his feet,

his face white with rage. "Can't you see we're not alone?"

In spite of his wonderful success as an escape artist, Houdini was always very keen to build and present a number of ordinary magical illusions. It was with this end in view that he called at my office one morning about twenty years ago, and told me of his secret ambition.

"What do you think of it, Will?" he asked finally.

"Your escapes are good and the public like them," I replied cautiously.

"I know that, but I'd like a change. Can you tell me the name of an illusion inventor who can keep a secret?"

"Yes. Why not try Charles Morritt, who has built stuff for Maskelyne and Devant, Ltd.?"

Houdini took my tip and paid a visit to Morritt's workshop. After some discussion he agreed to buy several of Morritt's own tricks, and commissioned the inventor to build them for him.

Harry decided to give his new show a trial run in the provinces. For some reason best known to himself, he left me definite instructions not to be present at the first night. Naturally I respected my friend's wishes, but I had a full account of the performance from another magician who was present.

One of Harry's best tricks consisted of producing five hundred gold sovereigns from an apparently empty bag. The audience received the programme well enough, but, in order to give it an extra fillip, Houdini thought out an extraordinary publicity stunt.

On the following day he hired a number of detectives to accompany him to the local bank. There, with a good deal of unnecessary ceremony and palaver, he paid in the five hundred sovereigns. Of course, the money was drawn out again for the next performance. This strange proceeding naturally caused a stir in the provincial town, which was just what Houdini wanted. There was a long account of the affair in the newspapers next morning, and no doubt the magician felt his trouble had been worth while.

He was wrong. The magical show was an utter and

complete failure. After a week's trial he wisely decided to return to his escapes. "If the English want escapes, they can have them," he explained to me afterwards. "But I'm determined to give a good magical show before I die." So he shipped all his apparatus to New York to be stored for use at some later date.

## CHAPTER VI

### DID HOUDINI FAIL ?

**I** CAN recall only one occasion when Houdini was baffled in an escape act. That he did eventually succeed in escaping from a pair of specially constructed cuffs after seventy minutes' struggling was in itself a great triumph, but he afterwards told me that it was the most nerve-racking ordeal in all his long magical experience. There was one thing, however, which he refused to disclose. That was the manner in which he freed himself.

A well-known newspaper challenged Houdini to escape from a pair of handcuffs made by a Birmingham blacksmith. This man had taken five years to perfect his invention, and it was said that the manacles could be opened only by a special key. Houdini, fearing nobody, and realising the value of the challenge as a free advertisement, readily accepted.

The test was held at the London Hippodrome, and it was generally expected that Houdini would free himself from the wonder cuffs in his customary time of two or three minutes. The manacles were placed on his wrists, and following his usual procedure, he entered the small cabinet which exposed only his face to the audience of two thousand people.

Five, ten, twenty minutes passed, and still Houdini had not escaped. The audience grew restless. Had Houdini met his Waterloo ? There was a cry of relief as he walked to the footlights at the end of half an hour, but when it was seen that his wrists were still secured, it turned to a sigh of disappointment. Perspiring profusely, he examined the handcuffs in the full glare of the electric light, and returned to his cabinet.



A few minutes later, he requested that a pillow might be placed on his knees in order to make his position more comfortable. But still the time went by, and he seemed no nearer success. The audience was amazed.

Fifteen minutes more elapsed, and Houdini asked that his coat might be removed. This request was refused, since it would have necessitated removing the handcuffs. So he procured a penknife from his pocket, and slashed the lining of the coat to ribbons.

At the end of an hour, he asked his wife to bring him a glass of water. This she did, placing it on the edge of the cabinet. Houdini took the glass between his hands and drained it. Ten minutes later he emerged from the cabinet and flung the handcuffs on to the stage. He was free, and his appearance was greeted with thunderous applause.

How did Houdini escape? Presumably he manipulated the handcuffs by his ordinary methods, but in this case the locks had proved so stubborn that it had taken him over an hour to persuade them to yield. That, at least, is what the public concluded. Perhaps the public was right. It may have been deceived. I do not know.

I only know that on the following day I was told a very different story. A man whose sources of information were usually correct told me that Houdini *did not escape from the handcuffs*.

After an hour's struggling, said my informant, the magician realised he would never escape. So he asked his wife for a glass of water, and gave her to understand she would have to procure the key at all costs. Bessie, realising the terrible predicament of her husband, called one of the journalists aside, and frankly told him that her husband was beaten. Since failure would have meant the end of everything for Houdini, whilst to the paper it meant but little, she asked to be given the key to pass on to her husband.

This request was granted. It was rumoured that Bessie placed the key in the glass of water and took it to Houdini on the stage. Shortly afterwards he walked from the cabinet with the handcuffs free from his wrists.

Personally, I think this story is an exaggeration. I can

readily believe that Houdini was capable of such a plan when he found his escape impossible, but whether a newspaper man of standing would have consented to deliver up the key is quite another matter. One must remember it would have been a great triumph from a newspaper's point of view to have brought about the defeat of such a celebrated escapologist as Houdini.

When Houdini came in to see me two days later, I put the question to him point blank. "Say, Harry," I said, "they're telling me you unlocked the handcuffs with the journalist's key. Is that true?"

"Who's been saying that?" he demanded.

"Never mind who. Is it true?"

"Since you know so much, Will, you had better find out the rest," was all he said.

This refusal of information on Houdini's part should not be construed as an admission of guilt. I expected it, for, knowing him as I did, I guessed he would welcome the story as a means of quiet publicity, even if it were untrue. On the other hand, if he did actually fail to escape, one would hardly expect him to admit it.

I am afraid we shall never know what actually happened, but you can take it from me that Houdini had the greatest shock of his life. He afterwards told me that he would sooner face death a dozen times than live through that ordeal again.

Once, when Houdini was performing in London, he decided to try out a new packing-case escape. The trick was very successful and he was well pleased with the reception he obtained. Half-way through the week he invited me to dine with him, and suggested I should accompany him to the theatre after the meal.

As we were putting on our hats and coats prior to setting off to the show, Houdini turned to me with a startled expression on his face. "Will!" he cried.

"Yes, Harry?" I replied, not knowing what to expect.

"Do you know how I escape from that packing-case?"

"I haven't given it a thought, Harry."

"You're lying," Houdini shouted. "Tell me the truth."

"I assure you, Harry . . ."

“Don’t lie, Will.” Houdini’s manner had become quieter now. “To be honest, I want to know if magicians are getting wise to my secrets. If you don’t know them, I’m not afraid of the others. Please tell me.”

I took a pencil and note-book from my pocket, and sketched an instrument which I thought could be used for the packing-case escape. Without speaking, I handed over my diagram to Houdini.

He went deathly pale. My long shot had gone home. “I’ll take this,” he said at last, tearing the sheet from my note-book. “This has finished me with packing-cases. After this performance, I’ll have no more.”

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME MORE NEW FACTS ABOUT HOUDINI

**I** HAVE already made some reference to Houdini's love of publicity. It was his very life blood. He invented so many schemes for bringing his name before the public that I could fill several volumes on those alone. Some of them failed, most of them succeeded. Had they not done so, he might easily have died a poor and unknown man.

Harry was not blind to the value of sentimental publicity. One of his favourite schemes was to hunt out the graves of any magicians who had lived in the particular town or district in which he was appearing. Then, accompanied by an army of Press photographers, he would take a huge wreath to the graveside, standing bareheaded whilst his photograph was taken. On the following day his likeness would appear in the papers with such words as "Great Magician pays homage to a departed conjurer." This idea tickled Harry immensely, and incidentally had the desired effect of increasing his popularity.

When he was performing in Paris before the War, he decided to carry out this same programme, and accordingly hunted up the grave and records of Robert Houdin, the eminent French illusionist. He went even further, and inquired for the whereabouts of Houdin's surviving relatives. To his utter astonishment, these good people refused to meet him, and informed him in a manner which left no room for doubt that they wished to have nothing to do with him.

This public rebuff made Harry very bitter. That anyone should refuse to see him, the great Houdini, was totally beyond his comprehension. I have never learnt the reason for this refusal on the part of Houdin's relatives, but most

likely they desired to be left in quietness. Possibly they hated the thought of publicity. But Houdini could not, or would not, take this point of view.

"Heavens, Will," he said, "what's wrong with me? Anyone would think I'm a leper! But they'll be sorry for it before I'm finished."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'm writing a book on Houdin that'll make those folks of his sit up. He's going to get the worst write-up he ever had. He was an impostor."

"Rubbish, Harry," I returned heatedly. "You know that's not true. Why be so vindictive? Houdin was a great magician, and you know it as well as anyone."

"He was an impostor, I tell you. I have collected my facts to prove it. And anyway," he added lamely, "the public will believe anything I tell them. *The Unmasking of Robert Houdin* will make everyone take notice."

"You are making a great mistake, Harry. Nobody will think you a better man for such a beastly action. Houdin is dead and cannot answer back. One of these days somebody will write a book on *you*, and call it *The Unmasking of Harry Houdini*."

He looked up sharply at my words. "If anyone does that it will be you," he said slowly.

I laughed. "Maybe you're right," I replied. "But if I ever write on Houdini, it will never be out of vindictiveness."

When the book eventually appeared, it was an utter failure. Although Harry had taken much trouble to delve out his facts, he had also allowed his imagination to run, and the information was not generally accepted as accurate. It was as well. Robert Houdin, "The French Father of Magic," was a man whom we all loved and respected. His spirit should rest in peace.

To err is human, and Houdini was a human being. He did not make many mistakes during his lifetime, but it must not be supposed that his judgment was always infallible. The greatest blunder he ever made was to act for the films.

Harry had an idea that he could make a fortune on the

screen. He decided to produce a film bringing in his more daring escapes, and was convinced that he would be an enormous success. Pride, they say, goes before a fall.

Houdini was never cut out for film acting. Some years later he told me that his venture had cost him more than £100,000. But that was not all. Arnold de Biere, who had been persuaded to put some money into the scheme, also lost several thousands. In this manner was a long and affectionate friendship smashed beyond repair.

De Biere and Houdini were very great friends before the unhappy failure. Afterwards they became bitter enemies. De Biere's long and painful story casts very little credit on the American magician.

I remember Houdini calling on me one morning in one of his ugliest moods.

"Hello, Harry," I said pleasantly. "A friend of yours has just been in."

"Oh. Who's that?"

"De Biere."

"That —," cried Houdini, using an epithet that would have sounded better from the lips of a bargee. "Does he often come in here?"

"Yes, quite often."

"Well, if I meet him, I'll fling him down the stairs. So to save you any bother, p'raps I'd best not see him. Say, how do you switch on that light outside your door?"

"I have a switch on my desk."

"That's O.K. When De Biere's in here with you, switch on the light. If I come up the stairs and see the light on I'll know who's in, and come back later."

I sighed. "All right, Harry," I said. "It's a fine idea."

After his film failure, Houdini decided to return to vaudeville. He remembered the magical apparatus that had been stored since his failure in England, and thought the time had come when he should again present his conjuring act. Yes, he would stage a programme that America had never seen before, and call it the "HOUDINI ROAD SHOW."

Now he wanted the American Press to boost him again, and it was some time before he hit on the right scheme. At

last he had an idea inspired by a number of spiritualistic lectures which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had been giving in the States. Houdini would expose the Spiritualists !

So Harry, the hero of sensational escapes, disguised himself and attended several of the séances which were being held as a direct outcome of Sir Arthur's tour. Then he declared he had discovered that Spiritualism was nothing but a gigantic fraud. He invited several pressmen to follow his lead, and find out the truth for themselves. As he had anticipated, his " disclosures," as he called them, created a great sensation.

As a Spiritualist myself, I am sure Houdini was not sincere in his statements. Every Jew believes through his religion that the spirit which passes out from the body at death lives on. And Houdini was really a good Jew. On the death of his mother, he prayed that her spirit would be guarded and protected, and that she would be eternally happy. No real disbeliever would do that.

When he had the Press of the country with him, Houdini put his show on the road. His campaign against the Spiritualists had met with such astounding success, that he decided to incorporate further propaganda in his programme.

His performance consisted of : (1) Magic and illusions. (2) Escapes (he could not entirely forget his old love). (3) A lecture against Spiritualism, introducing apparatus which, he declared, was used by " mediums " for faking spirit effects.

During the course of this lecture Houdini was in the habit of throwing a photograph of myself on to the screen. " This is a friend of mine in England," he would tell the audience. " He is a magician, an author, and an inventor. But what astounds me more than anything else is this—*he is a firm believer in Spiritualism !* "

" Come immediately, spend two days as my guest. Have arranged rooms for you at my digs.—HOUDINI."

Such was the telegram I received from my American friend when he was performing at Manchester many years ago. It so happened that I had no important engagements at the time, and decided to accept the invitation.



MR. J. C. CAXNELL, THE AUTHOR AND FLEET STREET JOURNALIST  
WHOSE BOOK, *THE SECRETS OF HOUDINI* CAUSED A SENSATION





When I arrived at the address Houdini had given me, my astonishment was so great that I could hardly find words to greet my host. The house was an insignificant theatrical residence, with typically cheap furniture and threadbare carpets. At first I was inclined to think I was the victim of a practical joke, for I knew that Houdini was earning well over £300 a week."

"Tell me, Harry," I said at length, "why in the name of goodness are you staying in a frowsy hole like this?"

"Frowsy?" Houdini raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Frowsy? Is it really now? I hadn't noticed. Anyway, Will, it doesn't matter much. The landlady is a heaven-born cook, she can dish up anything in first-rate style."

And with that I had to be content. In vain did I try to persuade Houdini to change his lodgings for a good class hotel. "Appearances count nothing with me," he said. "But with some decent food inside me, I feel that all's right with the world."

The following day was Saturday, and Houdini asked me if I would care to see the show he was presenting at the Manchester Palace. I readily agreed, and was installed in a comfortable seat before the second performance.

Houdini was accorded a tremendous reception when he appeared. Following his usual procedure, he performed several minor illusions before doing his "feature" trick, an escape from ropes and chains. When the audience had been worked up to a suitable state of excitement, he told them he was about to present "the world's greatest act," and asked if half a dozen gentlemen from the stalls would come on to the stage to secure his fastenings.

Several men stepped on to the stage, including myself. The volunteers did their work well, and Houdini was securely bound and chained. But one man, with ruddy cheeks and a waxed moustache, was bent on making things uncomfortable for him. "I don't like the look of this knot," he said, "it looks as if it might slip easily."

Houdini was never happy when people found fault with his performance, and in order to avoid all public embarrassment, he instituted a system which permitted his show to proceed with its accustomed smoothness. While the

disgruntled one was airing his protests, Houdini gave a secret sign to a man who was standing in the wings, well out of sight of the audience.

The confederate took the cue and smilingly beckoned to the victim. The man paused, scratched his head wonderingly, and walked off the stage. That was the last the audience saw of him. Incidentally it was the last he saw of the audience.

As soon as the unfortunate interrupter had walked well into the wings, he received a terrific cuff on the ear. In nine cases out of ten this treatment was sufficient persuasion that silence was by far the best policy at Houdini's performances. In this particular case, however, the victim showed fight. So much the worse for him.

He lashed out wildly with both fists. But from the start he was hopelessly outnumbered. Three or four of Houdini's assistants pounced on him and speedily but effectively silenced him. When the poor man had been knocked almost unconscious, he was placed beneath the stage to recover at his leisure.

As Houdini was returning to the dressing-room after the performance, he was approached by the house-manager. "What in God's name have your men done to that interrupter?" he gasped. "They've half murdered him!"

"They've done what?" asked Harry, assuming innocence. "I never told them to touch him. He must have got fresh."

The battered one was brought forward for inspection. He was indeed a sorry sight. Both eyes were closed, his lips were cut, and his nose had assumed elephantine proportions. The assistants had done their work not wisely but too well. However, the magician was not in the least perturbed.

"Really, my man," he said, producing a five-pound note from his pocket, "you must not upset my staff like this. I'm afraid you made them lose their tempers. However, I will discharge them. Meanwhile, George here will put you in a taxi and send you safely home. Good night."

The note changed hands. The victim, torn between a desire to thank Houdini for the fiver and an impulse to dot

him in the eye, was led away half protesting by the smiling George.

"Well, well," said Houdini to me in his dressing-room. "It's all in a lifetime, you know, Will, it's all in a lifetime. By the way, have you heard that story about the wife who broke her husband's nose with a flat-iron . . . ?"

A great man in many ways, Houdini had courage, determination, and infinite patience, but in some respects he was at times unscrupulous and dishonest.

On one occasion I asked him to dine with me at my flat. At that time my hobby was collecting pictures, of which I was said to be no mean judge. I was especially proud of one that I had recently bought, a small water-colour of a handsome woman. It was a real work of art, and occupied an important position on my drawing-room wall.

"How do you like that, Harry?" I asked, pointing with the stem of my pipe at my latest acquisition. "Pretty good, eh?"

"Good heavens, Will, that's mine!" came the startling reply.

"Yours?" I returned puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Of course it's mine. It was promised to me."

"Don't talk such rubbish. I can show you the receipt for it."

"I can't help that. It was offered to me, and I said I would consider the matter. I must have it."

"But I've paid for it."

"What you have done is no concern of mine. I claim that picture."

"Harry," I said gently. "Your friendship is worth more to me than that picture. Don't let's have words over it."

"No. Don't let's. I'll take it."

Houdini removed the picture from the wall. I watched him in silence, wondering at this strange streak of smallness in the man's character. The next time I saw my water-colour, it was hanging in the bedroom of Harry's New York home.

Of the weaker side of Harry Houdini's nature—his childishness, his irritability, and his quick temper—I have

already given instances. While it is not my intention to stress the faults of one who for many years was a friend, I feel it is my duty to present to the public a true pen picture of the man as I knew him.

This other side of Houdini's character was never better illustrated than at an annual dinner of the Magicians' Club, about a dozen years ago. We had decided that the gathering would provide a splendid opportunity of making him a presentation, for he had been our President since the inauguration of the club.

It so happened that the only available magician of any repute willing to occupy the chair and make the presentation was The Great Raymond. And Harry detested Raymond. "I won't accept anything from that ——," he declared hotly. "Why, he pinches my ideas," and then he went on to tell me in a few well-chosen words just what he thought of Raymond's capabilities.

I felt the position very keenly, but, to my relief, I managed to talk Harry over. I was a happy man when he eventually agreed to allow Raymond to officiate.

We had several hundred cards printed for distribution among our members. But they didn't please Houdini.

"These are all wrong," he said, when they arrived back from the printers.

"What's the matter with them?" I inquired, wondering what my friend had at the back of his mind.

"You've got here 'In the Chair—The Great Raymond.' He's not great at all."

"I shouldn't let that worry you. It's only a professional name."

"Well, it'll have to be altered. Call him just 'M. F. Raymond.' Even that's a damn sight too good for him. Don't let's argue about it, Will. Either you have these cards reprinted as I like them or I'll refuse to attend the dinner, and resign the presidency of the club in the bargain."

There was no argument. The cards were reprinted.

Houdini was a non-smoker and a teetotaler from choice. His work called for the possession of iron nerves and great strength, and he had to keep himself always in perfect

condition. He invented many excellent illusions which he never performed, for the public are hard taskmasters, and when a man has made himself famous all over the world by the performance of certain feats, they insist on seeing those feats, and no others, again and again.

One of Houdini's prettiest illusions—but never performed by him—was "The Hammock." The principal article used was a huge cotton reel with a quantity of cord wound round it. Through the centre of the reel was a metal bar which was fixed to two metal uprights on the stage.

The illusionist came forward, took the end of the cord from the reel and handed it to an assistant, who proceeded to unwind the cord from the reel by means of a windlass. After a few moments the performer had a curtain dropped from the flies; the curtain hid the cotton reel and part of the cord—the windlass being visible—but did not reach the stage. When, in a few seconds, the curtain was raised, a lady was shown reclining in a hammock, one end of which was fixed to the cross-bar and the other to the cord on the windlass.

This pretty effect was obtained very simply. The lady and the hammock were concealed in the reel. When the curtain was dropped the lady merely took the reel apart, came out on to the hammock, which by that time had been pulled out of its place of concealment, and then hid the two parts of the reel in pockets in the curtain.

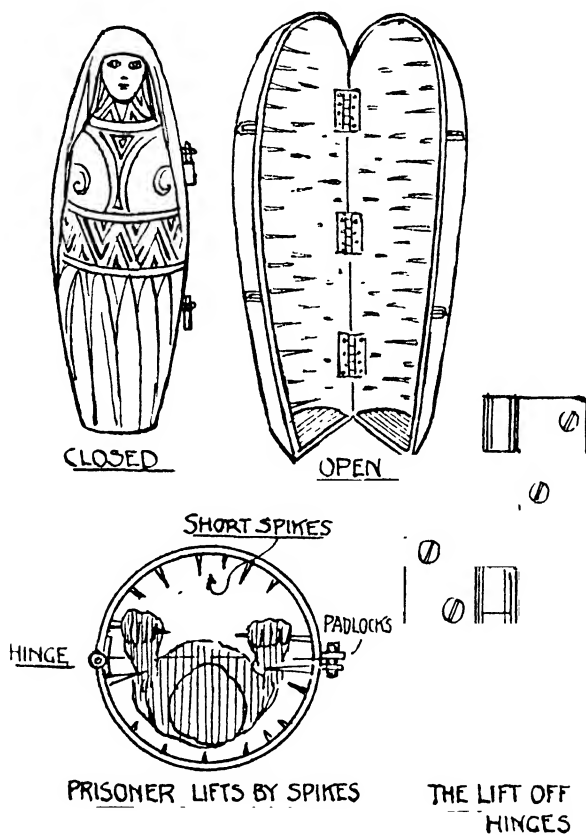
Another of Houdini's mysteries, invented and never performed, he called "The Spanish Maiden Escape."

The apparatus for this impressive feat is constructed from sheet iron hammered into shape and painted. The back of the "maiden" is fitted with three heavy hinges, and the front is fastened by three large heavy iron padlocks. The inside is fitted with a great number of iron spikes of various sizes—large spikes around the edges and smaller spikes on the inside. The diagram shows exactly the position of the performer when the "maiden" is closed.

The secret of the escape is in the hinges. The pin in each hinge is just long enough to allow the "maiden" to swing open and close. The performer is quite comfortable when

the "maiden" is closed, for the spikes do not reach to his body. The centre spikes are used as a ladder.

As soon as the curtains had been drawn over the cabinet in which the "maiden" was placed, Houdini would climb up one side of the hollow figure, standing on the spikes, and by thus forcing up the side separated the hinges from the



pins. He would then make his exit, the padlocks acting as front hinges, and the "maiden" would be fitted back into the correct position.

The model for this escape, made by Houdini himself, was in my possession until recently, when I presented it to the Society of American Magicians. It is now an exhibit in the Will Goldston Collection in their museum.

Houdini varied his methods from time to time, for he knew at nearly every performance someone would try to ferret out some of his secrets ; therefore he did not always make use of the same device for getting out of his difficulties.

If he knew that he was not going to be thoroughly searched by experts before giving his performance, he would use a belt of his own design in which various fakes were at hand. These fakes were suspended, by means of bull-dog clips, on a narrow belt running round the top of the trousers. The various tools were then hidden by two flaps, of the same material as the trousers, and the flaps were kept in position, hiding the secret belt, by the ordinary trousers belt, the lower fold of the shirt also helping to conceal the secret.

In this way Houdini was able to get any fake he wanted in half a second, and thus managed some of his most sensational escapes.

Once his feet were set on the ladder of success, Houdini's progress was rapid, and he leaped from triumph to triumph.

At fifty-two he met his death when at the height of his fame. In the magician's dressing-room at Montreal, a student who had heard that Houdini could receive hard blows on the stomach without feeling discomfort, struck two or three experimental blows. Houdini was not prepared for them, and the blows caused his death some days later. His body was taken to New York in a stage coffin in which he had been making experiments under water.



## CHAPTER VIII

### DE KOLTA'S "VANISHING LADY" SECRET

**N**OT often does genius gain instant recognition from the public, but the life of Beautier de Kolta—who was responsible for some of the finest illusions in the whole history of magic—offers a story of immediate leap to fame. With his celebrated "Vanishing Lady" illusion ("La Femme Enlevée"), produced at the Eden Theatre, Paris, in 1886, he came to the front with one step and sprang a surprise that was to mystify not only Paris but the whole world.

It has been said that all the greatest magicians began their careers in their cradles, and certainly this is almost true of de Kolta. Indeed, on being asked once when he was first attracted to magic, he shrugged his shoulders and admitted that he could not remember the time when it had not a great fascination for him.

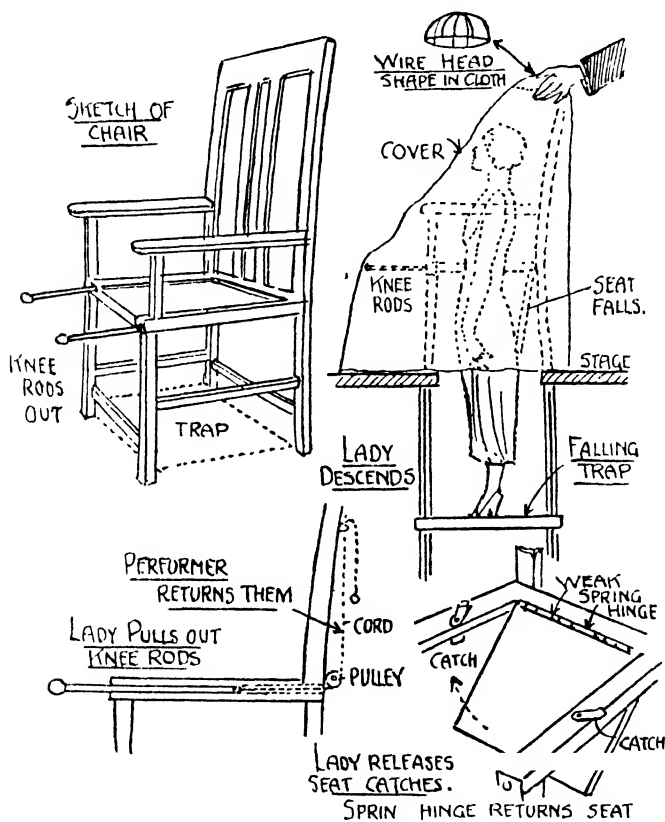
He gave many very creditable performances when a mere boy, and he soon experienced the urge that animates every genius to create. I use the word genius deliberately, for that is what Beautier de Kolta undoubtedly was. Perhaps the general public, although knowing him as a brilliant performer, did not realise that the man who was mystifying them was really a great creative artist ; but those magicians who were aware of de Kolta's work knew quite well that it came from a master of magic—one whose name would always be honoured so long as there was a magician left to pay homage to it.

Now the title of an illusion is an important detail, for it must be descriptive without being too liberal with its information ; it must awaken the curiosity of the public and end there. In the case of "The Vanishing Lady" the simplicity of the title attracted attention.

Within a very short time of the first production of the

## DE KOLTA'S "VANISHING LADY" SECRET 85

illusion all Paris was coming to see it, and long before the first run was over its fame had spread over France. Nothing like it had ever been heard of before—to the lay mind the mystery was inexplicable. The name of de Kolta was noised abroad and he was a welcome guest—for fees which at that time were considered colossal—at entertainments



given by the wealthiest Parisians in their own homes. De Kolta's programme for a private performance was just as novel and as mysterious as any he could devise for a public show.

Numerous imitators were soon at work, and many a "Vanishing Lady" must have been extremely disappointing to audiences who gathered, from the title, that they were going to see de Kolta's masterpiece.

De Kolta's method was first to show a large newspaper, which he placed in the centre of the stage, thus demonstrating that the illusion was not effected by the use of any trap in the stage. Next, the illusionist showed what appeared to be an ordinary drawing-room chair, both the back and the front of which the audience were allowed to see before de Kolta placed it on the newspaper. A lady entered and sat down on the chair. The magician threw a large shawl over her, draping it so that it did not hide the whole of the newspaper. When, after a short, dramatic pause, he whisked the shawl away, the lady had vanished !

This effective illusion was achieved in an extremely simple manner. When de Kolta was draping the shawl round the lady he quickly put into place a frame of metal, which had been hidden behind the back of the chair, and which was so made that when it was draped by de Kolta the audience were led to believe that the shawl was really concealing the lady.

Actually, the newspaper had a trap cut in it and there was a trap in the stage. When the lady appeared to be seated on the chair she was really standing over the trap, for the shape and height of the chair had been so arranged that this position was easy. The trap was quickly opened and, as the shawl was drawn away, the metal fake was also drawn back to its original place behind the back of the chair. The seat of the chair was fitted with spring hinges, so that, although the seat sloped downwards when the assistant was making her way through the trap, it resumed its original position immediately afterwards.

The metal fake representing the head and shoulders of the lady was made of very thin, flat steel, painted black, and when lying close against the back of the chair was invisible to anyone standing a few feet away from it. The fake swung upwards and downwards at a touch.

It must be remembered that when this illusion was first produced, it was a complete novelty ; nothing of the kind had ever been seen before. Since de Kolta's day his inventions have been filched by many illusionists and his methods utilised in a number of different ways, but for a

long time he had matters all his own way; he was unapproachable.

Eventually de Kolta came to London, where his fame had preceded him, and appeared at the entertainment given by Maskelyne and Cooke at the Old Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly. The "Vanishing Lady" was just as successful in London as it had been in Paris, and de Kolta stayed for a long season.

Then, after a short tour abroad, he returned to London with another famous illusion, "The Cocoon," in which a lady appeared from nowhere.

So popular was this illusion that when de Kolta left the Egyptian Hall he had to go only a very short distance for another engagement. He appeared at the London Pavilion for a season of seven months. While there he had the honour of a command performance from the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII). This performance was a great success, and shortly afterwards, when he was appearing in Paris, the illusionist received a command to perform for the entertainment of Queen Victoria and some of the younger members of the Royal Family.

An unassuming man, de Kolta cared nothing for publicity, and although he had to come from Paris specially for this engagement, he never mentioned the fact to anyone and no notice of the performance, which was certainly successful, appeared in the London papers.

Afterwards de Kolta appeared at the old Royal Aquarium, Westminster, at the Crystal Palace, and at the Empire, Leicester Square, playing a long season at each place. Later, too, he presented his illusions at the Wintergarten, Berlin, and then in America, where he stayed for a long time.

Then came a holiday—a holiday in name only, for when he was not performing in public, he was occupied with inventing new illusions or thinking of possible improvements of old ones.

His last appearance was in America in 1903, where he presented his greatest illusion, "The Expanding Die."

De Kolta would come forward with a small bag in his hand. From the bag he would take a little die and put it

on a raised platform on the stage, saying, as he took it out, "This is my wife."

The die quickly expanded. Only those magicians who have tried to devise a small die that would act in this way, all six sides expanding at once, know of the terrific difficulty of the problem.

But this was not all, by a long way. When the die had expanded to its full extent, de Kolta showed that he had spoken the truth—his wife stepped out of the die !

To explain the working of the die would require many pages of technical description and diagrams of the apparatus, which was purely mechanical ; when certain springs were released the die worked itself. But how did the lady get inside ? That she did get inside was obvious to everyone in the audience, for they saw her come out. Many magicians were completely beaten by the problem. The die, it must be remembered, was placed on a platform raised well away from the stage.

In devising this illusion de Kolta made a stroke of genius. On paper the sudden appearance of the lady will seem to be a very simple affair, but magicians never forget that it is the simple idea which is so difficult to evolve, and that practically all the finest illusions ever invented have simple explanations.

In this case the lady was concealed in an innocent looking table standing near the platform ; when the die had expanded she merely had to step from the table to the die and out of it ! The illusion was perfect.

While playing at New Orleans, during his American tour in 1903, de Kolta was struck down with yellow fever and never recovered. He died on October 7th, 1903. As England had always been his favourite country, his friends saw to it that his body was brought to England, and he was buried in Hendon Park Cemetery, London, on November 11th. All his effects passed into my possession.

Shortly after his death I purchased his illusions, and passed the secrets on to my brother magicians.

When Houdini was in England in 1914 he decided to urge magicians to erect a suitable memorial to de Kolta, but the War broke out and the idea fell through. The



LONG TACK SAM THE GREAT CHINESE MAGICIAN AND ASSISTANTS



name of de Kolta, however, needs no memorial of stone or bronze to be remembered and revered by all magicians.

De Kolta invented many other illusions in addition to those I have mentioned, and the magical world has him to thank for many effective tricks.

One of his best tricks was the production of a quantity of flowers from a cone-shaped paper bag. The bag was shown to be empty and in a second it was full of flowers. Magicians realised that in this trick the main secret was the construction of the flowers, and for a long time de Kolta was able to keep the secret to himself. But one evening, when he was performing the trick in Paris, a sudden draught blew across the stage and took one of the flowers over the footlights to the orchestra. In a short time the secret was out and to-day this trick remains one of the prettiest and most effective of all production tricks.

The flowers can be either of silk or paper. Each bloom is made with a tiny piece of watch-spring in its centre. Thus the flower can be folded up and kept flat, but directly any pressure on it is removed it expands to a large size. A packet of fifty or more of these flowers can be palmed and, therefore, easily introduced into a paper bag. If they are kept closed by a small band of tissue paper, the magician merely has to tear the paper band and the flowers expand. Fifty blooms will fill a large bag and, as a rule, at least three packets of flowers are used.

De Kolta also invented a number of appliances for conjurers, and some excellent tricks in which they can be used.

He was always at work, and any room of the house in which he happened to be staying was his workshop; he could work anywhere. In the middle of a conversation with a friend, an idea for a new trick or illusion or for the improvement of an old one would suddenly occur to him, and off he would go and start to put his idea into shape.

He made all his own tricks and illusions; even the tools he used were home-made, and he preferred nails which he made himself, out of wire, to any others. It is said that all the tools he ever possessed were not worth more than a few shillings, and that his favourite tool was an old knife,



fitted with a reel which served as a handle and as a screw-driver. Maybe he purposely restricted himself in this way because he knew that, with only the simplest tools at hand, his tricks and illusions had to be simple.

Such methods are the exact opposite of most magicians, past and present, but it is generally admitted that, working in his own way, with his own simple tools, and without any elaborate workshop, de Kolta was able to produce effects which have never been surpassed by any magician.

Some of his smaller tricks are still performed by illusionists all over the world, for the good reason that they can find nothing better. The fact is really not surprising, for, when one comes to think of it, a trick which has been invented by a famous magician for his own use—as all de Kolta's tricks were—must obviously be better than one devised mainly with the idea that large numbers of it may be made and sold for the benefit of the inventor.

In addition to inventing tricks and illusions, de Kolta also created a new principle of magic, known as “Black Art,” upon which many illusions have been based. He discovered that any articles covered with black velvet were rendered invisible to the audience if placed in front of a black velvet screen or back cloth.

There are many ways in which that idea—which seems simple enough nowadays, but which never occurred to any magician until de Kolta's fertile brain produced it—can be used. For example, a small bag of black velvet, containing a number of articles which the conjurer wishes to produce, will be invisible to an audience if placed in a box lined with black velvet; the box can be held within a few feet of a spectator without the presence of the bag being even suspected, for it certainly cannot be seen.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRUTH ABOUT THE INDIAN ROPE TRICK

**W**HO, I wonder, among my readers has not at some time been thrilled by stories of the marvels said to be performed by Indian magicians ?

To Western minds the East is always closely linked with mystery, and it is a common belief that Indian magic is more wonderful than that of any other country.

This superstition indeed dies hard. Distance lends colour to stories which in their elements make a strong appeal to the imagination ; and, as travellers' tales lose nothing in the telling, a legendary glamour has grown up around the tricks and illusions presented by the jugglers and fakirs of India. Thus, while there is much to be said for Indian magic, at the same time much of it is myth.

Take, for instance, the Indian rope trick—perhaps the most celebrated trick in the world. You hear of it everywhere, but never succeed in coming into contact with any person who himself claims to have witnessed it. The story is always the same : “ I know a man who saw it ! ”

In fact, the rope trick is the will-o'-the-wisp of the magical world.

To appreciate fully the wonders of this mystery one has to remember that it is supposed to be performed in the open air. The miracle worker, surrounded by sightseers, has a large coil of rope at his feet. Calling upon the spectators to watch him, he tosses the end of the rope into the air a few times and lets it fall to the ground. Then, to the accompaniment of mutterings and incantations, he throws up the rope with more force, so that some seventeen or eighteen feet of it go up into the air and remain taut, as though held by some invisible hand in the sky.

An Indian boy climbs to the top of the rope. The

magician calls to him to descend, threatening him with fearful punishments if he does not instantly obey. The crowd look up, expecting to see the boy slide down the rope, and while they are looking he vanishes in mid-air !

Sometimes the boy reappears and comes running through the circle of spectators, but as a rule the trick finishes with the disappearance of the boy and the falling of the rope.

All kinds of explanations of this astonishing trick have been suggested, and huge rewards have been offered to any Indian magician who will come to England and present the Indian rope trick on an English stage, but the offers have never been accepted.

What is the real secret of this trick ? Is it possible that the Indian fakir stands near two buildings and that the rope is made to stay in its place by means of stout threads "worked" from the roofs of the buildings ? Does the fakir so arrange matters that the audience cannot possibly see exactly what happens, for the simple reason that the sun is in their eyes ? Is it possible, too, if the trick is done in this way, that the boy who climbs up the rope never really disappears, and that, when the eyes of the audience are turned to the second boy who comes running into the circle, the rope is allowed to drop, bringing with it the boy, who, mixing at once with the crowd, is not noticed ?

These solutions have been offered, but who is to decide if they are near the truth, seeing that nobody can be found who has actually seen the trick ?

Hypnotic influence is another explanation put forward for this illusion. It is said that the fakir never begins his performance with the rope trick (he would be a fool if he did), but leads off with a number of small tricks done under the noses of the audience. It has been suggested that in this way the magician contrives to look into the eyes of the members of his audience, and afterwards, when he is doing the rope trick, he is able, by hypnotic suggestion, to make them believe that they see something which in fact does not happen.

Such a suggestion is plainly fantastic and will not bear the test of a moment's thoughtful consideration.

Hypnotic suggestion by one man to another might,

perhaps, produce an optical illusion, but if I am asked to believe that a mixed crowd, with its varying temperaments and degrees of responsiveness, could be controlled by one man, my reply would be that the idea is sheer nonsense.

Firmly believing the old saying that if you give a lie a month's start you will never catch it up, I have come to the conclusion that the Indian rope trick is—a myth. Like other legends it is no doubt a picturesque version of a few simple facts unrelated to the miraculous.

The plain truth about the Indian rope trick is that it is utterly beyond the power of mankind to achieve the effects claimed for this illusion.

Some years ago David Devant, the famous English magician, wished to perform the rope trick at St. George's Hall, and, in the hope of getting a truthful account of the trick from someone who had seen it, he offered to pay handsomely for such a record. There was, however, no response to his offer. Accordingly, he adhered as closely as he could to the old legend.

In Devant's version of the illusion, the rope was already made fast before the trick began ; a man climbed up the rope and, when about half-way up, suddenly vanished. It was an effective illusion, but, as I have said, the first part of the trick was cut out altogether. One must bear in mind also that the sudden disappearance of the man when half-way up the rope was managed on a stage. Many effective stage illusions could not possibly be performed in the open air.

Almost as famous as the Indian rope trick is the Indian basket trick, and perhaps the most amazing thing about this effect is that it has ever deceived anybody.

The magician shows a large round basket, which is obviously empty. A boy gets into the basket and appears to fill it completely, for the juggler apparently has some difficulty in putting on the lid. When the lid is at last in position, the performer stands aside, picks up a large sword, and stabs at the basket from all sides. It is obvious that the sword really penetrates the basket. Loud shrieks are heard and, if he wishes to be very realistic, the illusionist shows the point of the sword dripping with blood, but out

of respect for European stomachs this little detail is usually omitted.

Then, pulling off the lid, the magician jumps into the basket himself. This is done to convince the audience that the boy has not really been stabbed and that he has disappeared. The magician steps out again, replaces the lid, and throws a large cloth over the basket.

The cloth moves ! The illusionist snatches it away and the lid is raised. The boy, uninjured, steps out of the basket.

This trick is really too easy. The basket is much larger than it appears to be ; that is to say, although the boy seems to have some difficulty in getting into the basket he could, if he liked, duck down directly he was in it and start the trick. The preliminary part is done merely for effect. The boy then curls himself round at the bottom of the basket, leaving a space in the centre, his body and legs being in a circle.

The wonder-worker stabs above the boy and in a downward direction to the centre of the bottom of the basket. There is still plenty of room in the basket for the performer—the rest is merely showmanship. The trick has been performed many times in England.

Sometimes the illusion is varied slightly. After the magician has apparently killed the boy, the spectators hear a cry of joy, and, looking round, see the boy running towards them. Needless to say, he is not the boy who got into the basket and who remains there.

The mango trick is another famous Indian mystery which has been fantastically described so many times by travellers that the general public, reading these descriptions, have been convinced that the trick is almost miraculous.

It is said that the magician, standing in the open air, shows an empty flower-pot and fills it with earth. In the earth he plants a seed of mango. This is covered for a few moments, and when the cover is removed, the spectators see a little green shoot sticking up in the pot.

The green shoot is covered again for a few moments and then the spectators see that it has grown. Afterwards, so

it is said, the audience see the mango grow visibly before their eyes and bear fruit !

Now this trick is never performed by one magician ; the principal conjurer has three or four assistants, each of whom is an expert performer of small sleight-of-hand tricks. Add to this fact two others—one, that the mango trick is not presented quickly, but in stages, with an interval between each stage, and during each interval some other trick is performed.

The other important fact is connected with the way in which the pot of earth is covered. A small tent is used and the performer raises one side of the tent when he wishes the audience to get a glimpse of the growing plant. It does not need much knowledge of magic to guess what goes on on the side of the tent which the audience do not see raised ! What could not any magician do under such conditions with three or four assistants to help him ! The assistants have their own tricks in bags (which can be used for other purposes), and two or three blankets also seem necessary for their comfort.

It all comes to this. There are many opportunities for secretly adding the pieces of the growing tree to the pot, and just as many opportunities for concealing those pieces near the pot until they are wanted. The audience never see the tree growing visibly before their eyes and bearing fruit. A European conjurer would laugh at the idea of using three or four assistants, and all the paraphernalia they have with them, to produce such a simple effect as the mango tree.

A very much better trick—and one which seems to have escaped the attention of most travellers—is a favourite with the Brahmin fakirs, who perform single-handed and almost in a nude state, their only clothing when they are performing being a small loin cloth.

After the usual preliminaries—the beating of a tom-tom and singing or chanting—the fakir suddenly throws a large sheet around him. In a moment the sheet is removed and the audience see a large coconut hanging from the fakir's mouth.

In this way three large nuts are produced, each of a

different colour. Quantities of soft goods are produced in a similar manner.

The various articles are stored away in a little pouch which is suspended between the fakir's legs and is concealed, of course, by the loin cloth. Directly the performer is enveloped in the sheet he can easily get at any article he wants.

The celebrated Indian turban trick is really only a little trick known to most English schoolboys, who do it with a piece of string ! Naturally the trick is more effective when done with a turban.

The illusion consists in cutting the turban in two and then joining the two pieces together by magic. By the way in which the magician folds the turban before he cuts it, he leads the audience to believe that the cut is in the centre ; as a matter of fact, only a little piece is cut from one end of the turban and this is easily hidden in the conjurer's hand.

The Indians are expert sleight-of-hand performers, and a good deal of their proficiency is due to the fact that they perform the same few tricks over and over again.

One good trick, which is not suitable for indoor performance, is that of the diving duck. The magician places a small tin on the ground and pours water into it, in doing so contriving to spill some of the water.

Earth is thrown into the water and it is stirred up, so that it is no longer transparent. A little china duck is then floated on the water. The magician tells the duck to dive and it dives ! The performance is repeated several times.

The explanation of this effect is simple. There is a very small hole in the bottom of the vessel and a long hair with a loop to it is run through the hole. In putting the duck in the water, the illusionist engages its foot in the loop of hair. To make it dive, he merely has to pull on the hair. The object of spilling some of the water is to conceal the fact that the vessel, having a small hole in it, leaks slightly. A cunning idea.

## CHAPTER X

### TRICKS OF BOGUS MEDIUMS

**M**AGICIANS and Spiritualists being hereditary foes, my partisanship of both has caused me often to be regarded by many people as a trifle eccentric.

Formerly by profession—and in interest still—a magician, yet I openly confess to belief in things occult. At the same time I agree that some fraud does creep into Spiritualism, and there are, unfortunately, numerous bogus mediums preying on the credulity and inexperience of hundreds of men and women who are anxious for “evidence” from the spiritual world.

In exposing some of the tricks practised by bogus mediums, my object is to help those mediums who are what they profess to be.

The mere charlatans who trade on the curiosity of their clients—sometimes on their natural desire to get into touch with the spirits of dear friends or relatives who have passed away—are despicable beings, and it is in the hope of preventing people from being gulled by them, that I describe some of the tricks practised by these heartless rogues.

Their methods, I must point out, are varied from time to time. It is possible that a reader who has been to the séance of a bogus medium may think, after reading my description of the trick of which he was a victim, “Oh, that’s impossible; it could not have been done in that way when I was there. The medium must have been genuine.” But if no precautions against trickery were taken it is improbable that the medium was genuine; a true medium has no objection to such precautions, and most mediums, in fact, welcome them.

One simple trick which I will describe is very effective in convincing any sceptical sitter at a séance of the presence



of "spirits," because it is performed in broad daylight and under extremely strict conditions. If someone were to insist on the "medium" being clad in a bathing suit, the trickster would find the feat just as easy, and a most careful search of the room would yield no clue to the performance of the trick.

Visitors to the séance are at once convinced of the honesty of the so-called "medium," and come again to him for séances which are not given in full light, and which naturally, therefore, afford a greater opportunity for fraud.

The "medium" invites his victims to sit at a small table. He accompanies them and asks that the hands of all present be placed on the table and spread out so that the little fingers of anybody sitting at the table touch those of persons sitting on his right and left. Under such conditions all opportunities for any trickery seem impossible. It must be remembered, too, that the séance is given in broad daylight.

The sitting begins perhaps with prayers and the singing of hymns, for a bogus medium will stoop to any blasphemy to gain his ends. Besides, it is necessary, from his point of view, to get the sitters into the right frame of mind. They must be led to believe that some supernatural occurrence is about to take place. Another reason for the prayers and hymns is to fill up time; the séance must not be too short, neither must the evidence of the presence of "spirits" be produced too abruptly.

In due course, the medium suggests that questions should be asked, and that if the answer to any question is "Yes" the spirits will reply in their own way. Almost immediately the sitters are surprised at hearing three distinct taps on the table. The medium explains that three such taps will obviously mean "Yes," and one tap may be taken to mean "No." The séance then begins.

Anyone may ask questions. The answers are not always given directly; sometimes the medium purposely arranges for a long pause before the tapping is heard. At some séances the medium will pretend to be in a semi-trance, and will sink back in his chair, apparently in a state of physical exhaustion, but as his hands are still on the table

and no trickery can be *seen*, the sitters are convinced that the proceedings are genuine.

As a matter of fact, this is one of the easiest of the tricks performed by these rogues.

The top of the table is really a shallow box ; the table can be thoroughly examined and the medium can consent to its being placed in any part of the room. In the foot of one of the legs of the table is a rubber bulb, painted to look exactly like the wood. Fitted to this bulb is a rubber tube ending in a little metal rod. To produce the mysterious taps, which he attributes to the presence of spirits, the medium has merely to sit at the table and press with his foot on the rubber bulb, causing the metal rod to hit the underneath part of the table-top. Nothing could be simpler—from the point of view of the bogus medium !

Having worked his sitters into a credulous state of mind, the medium suggests that perhaps one of the spirits may be induced to write an answer to a message. An ordinary slate is produced, which can be examined and cleaned by any of the sitters. The medium hands the slate to everyone in turn, his real object in doing this being to convince the people that he has nothing concealed in his hands, and at that moment he *has* nothing.

Possibly the medium will speak of the difficulty of getting into contact in full light ; in any case, he will make some excuse for holding the slate under the table. When he brings it out to the light again he has nothing in his hand except the slate, on one side of which is a written answer to the question that has been asked.

The secret of this fraud is simple. When the last person to handle the slate is examining it, the medium, sitting with his hands on his lap, puts his left fingers up his right sleeve and brings down a little flesh-coloured thimble fastened to a piece of elastic tied to his arm. In one side of this thimble is fixed a small piece of soft chalk. When the medium is going to hold the slate under the table, he keeps his middle finger, on which he has put the thimble, under the slate, and his little finger and thumb above it.

There is a little ledge under the table, and to assist him

in the performance of the trick the medium rests the slate on it. To write a short message with his middle finger is an easy matter. This done, he turns his middle finger inwards, slips off the thimble, and the elastic carries it up his sleeve and so out of sight. Then he produces the slate and shows the message.

Sometimes the impostor will have a lady assistant, who will pretend to fall into a trance and answer questions, but before this happens the sitters are asked to write their questions on pads which are handed to them. Each person keeps the paper with the question on it, but the pads are collected by the medium, who goes into an adjoining room to fetch his assistant.

She enters, sits in an easy-chair, and eventually pretends to fall into a trance. She then gives an intelligent answer to each question.

This trick is also quite easy. The under-side of each sheet in each writing pad is rubbed with a little dry soap. When anything is written on one of the sheets, the question is really written invisibly on the sheet below, and when the medium is out of the room he has only to sprinkle a little powdered dye on each pad to make each question visible. The trick can be worked very quickly because no one is looking on, and the lady assistant is in readiness for it.

If the trickster wishes to produce a long answer to a question, he prepares the table beforehand by sticking what is known as the "flap" of a slate to the under-side of the table. The "flap" is merely a piece of thin cardboard painted to resemble the slate which is being used. The message is written on the "flap." The slate is then cleaned and examined; the medium holds it under the table, and, in doing so, gets the "flap" away and sticks it down on the slate. If the apparatus is well made the trick is undetectable.

Sometimes the medium asks his sitters to arrange themselves in a semicircle. To each person he hands a card and an envelope, and the sitter, after writing a question on the card, puts the card in the envelope, seals it, and gives it to the medium, who holds it to his forehead and gives a good

answer to the question. Of course, he does not do this quickly ; his eyes are closed during the various " readings," and he appears to be in a kind of semi-trance.

This is another easy trick. Inside his waistcoat, near the top, the medium has two little pockets, one on each side. Each holds a small sponge soaked in alcohol. Two pockets are necessary, so that the medium may vary the movements of his hands at each " reading."

He merely has to get out a little sponge and pass it quickly over the envelope, which then becomes temporarily transparent. The " medium " can read what is on the card inside the envelope. The alcohol quickly evaporates, and so at the end of the sitting the envelopes can be examined if necessary—but few sitters ever think it is ! They have had their questions mysteriously " read " and answered, and that has been sufficient for them.

A medium who professes to produce materialisations of spirits has a straightforward task, because a séance of that kind is never conducted in full light. Indeed, very often the medium insists on total darkness, and the windows are draped with heavy, thick curtains.

Anyone unacquainted with the methods employed to produce these bogus materialisations might search a medium thoroughly before a séance, without discovering that he had anything concealed on him which could possibly produce the effect he intends to present.

Take, for example, the materialisation of a baby spirit—perhaps the foulest of all these wicked frauds. The whole apparatus for the trick can be carried—in fact, it usually is carried—in the medium's watch-case, from which the watch, of course, has been removed.

The materialisation, as I have said, is produced in total darkness or in very poor light. A small balloon, which the medium can easily inflate, serves as the baby's head ; a tiny clip on the balloon prevents the air from escaping until the materialisation is over. With a tiny telescopic rod the head can be made to " float " at some distance from the medium. Draped round the head and falling from it, is some fine white Chinese silk, painted usually with luminous paint, although the paint is not always necessary.

Larger materialisations are managed in a similar way, but the articles required cannot be put into a watch-case.

The chief item in the stock-in-trade of a trickster of this sort is a supply of ordinary cheese cloth. This material has a wide mesh, but the mesh is not visible in total darkness and the material appears to be as plain as a sheet. The cheese cloth is soaked in water to take out the stiffening, and it is then so soft that it can be manipulated easily. As the material takes up little room in the pocket, a medium usually has two or three pieces of the stuff secreted on him, so that he may produce "spirits" of different heights.

The medium bends his arm at the elbow and drapes the material over his closed hand; the cloth is clipped at the top by two of the knuckles. If the reader will experiment with a handkerchief thrown over his hand in this position, he will see that the bowing of the head can easily be imitated by bending the hand at the wrist. To make the figure rise in the air it is only necessary to raise the hand; and various other movements can readily be simulated in a similar way.

It will be seen that only those people who have some knowledge of the effects which can be produced by trickery are competent to say whether a medium is false or true.

On one occasion, after a "spirit" had been materialised by the methods I have described, one of the sitters, unacquainted with secrets of bogus mediums, unnoticed by the medium cut off a piece of the "spirit's" robe. He took the scrap of cloth to a number of the best shops in London and was told that nothing exactly like it was made.

The man had been in doubt about the medium, but his experience at the shops inclined him to think that perhaps, after all, the material was not of earthly origin. Luckily for this investigator, however, a friend to whom he confided his experiences at the shops was able to tell him that it was not likely he would be able to match the material, for the simple reason that the shops do not soak cheese cloth in water and dry it before they offer it for sale!

One of the most important pieces of apparatus in the tool-bag of a fraudulent medium is a pair of lazy-tongs. When closed they take up little space in the pocket, but

they can easily be extended to reach across the room. The ends of the tongs are fitted with a simple spring-grip, which can hold any light article used in the séance, including a trumpet or even a "ghost." Tongs of this type have figured in police court cases in which bogus mediums have been sent to prison because of some exposure at a séance.

These tongs can be put to many uses, and frequently they are the means by which a trick ghost, such as I have described, is made to float about a darkened room.

There is no darkness like that of a séance room and no atmosphere which can compare with it. After an hour in dark silence, even a highly sceptical person often becomes susceptible, and finds himself thinking that, after all, there "may be something in it."

The creation of such an atmosphere is part of the bogus medium's business; indeed the chief part, for the least unusual movement or sound of a voice after a long period of waiting in darkness will startle or interest the sitters. Those taking part in the séance are, when the manifestations begin, generally at the lowest ebb of their powers of scrutiny and critical observation.

Another use for the lazy-tongs is to operate, at some distance from the medium, a tiny bellows, which creates draughts, attributed to the movements of spirits. They can be used, too, as a means of conveying an impression of seeing "astral lights" in the séance room. The use of sulphur paint can aid in this deception.

Flowers and other articles are sometimes projected mysteriously into séances. To the sitters, these have come from another plane, transported by some spirit miracle, but when the bogus medium is at work, his useful implement, the lazy-tongs, which are not so lazy as their name would suggest, has been used again.

In such cases, the flowers are kept in the medium's rubber-lined pocket, where there is a little block of ice, until the right moment. The ice produces the correct touch of coldness compatible with the mystery of the séance room. The usual explanation of this chilly condition of the flowers is that they have travelled many miles to the circle.

There are mediums who claim to be "controlled" on

occasions by the ancient sun worshippers, and they say that, while so controlled, they are immune from the effects of fire or burns. As a rule, the mediums who make these claims are women. While under the "control" of a sun worshipper, such a woman can hold her fingers in the flame of an oil lamp or candle without burning them. She can even pass her hair through the blaze and it will not catch fire.

A recipe for this wonder once revealed by a bogus medium is as follows : dissolve half an ounce of camphor in two ounces of *aqua vitæ* ; add one ounce of quicksilver and an ounce of liquid styrax, which is the product of myrrh and prevents the camphor igniting. Shake and mix them well. Paint the inside of the hand and fingers with this preparation, and allow to dry.

To make possible the contact of the hair with a flame without burning, the formula, as given by the bogus medium, is this : dissolve all the salt a tea-cup of water will contain, and, in another cup, place a teaspoonful of soda in warm water. Pour the two together, and, after they are well mixed, wash the hair, or that part of it to be employed in the experiment. Then comb until dry.

To walk on a bar of red-hot iron, the same medium disclosed that it was necessary only to add to the first preparation for passing the hand through flames pulverised red stones, which should be stirred with the rest of the ingredients and afterwards rubbed on the bottom of the feet.

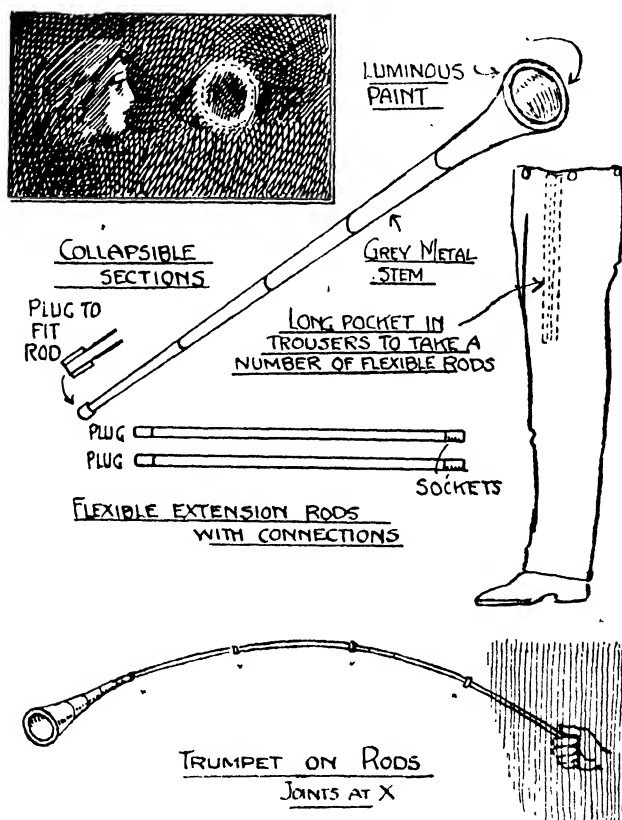
One fraudulent medium whom Houdini exposed gave the following method of making a spirit hand with fingers.

"Paint on a piece of cardboard an open hand with the fingers spread out. Do not cut out the outline of the hand, but fill in between the fingers with black. Just trim off the parts of the card in excess of width or length of the hand. Now turn the card over and proceed to paint the same sized hand, with the difference that the fingers are not spread out. Paint all the rest of the card black.

"During the séance put the painted hand into the lazy-tongs or lifting rod, and, by quickly turning it, first on one side and then on the other, to your audience in the

dim light, it will present the appearance of an open hand with the fingers spreading and closing."

Many a poor victim has been deceived at a so-called spiritualistic séance by the spirit trumpet trick, which is really very good, from the point of view of a magician.



Before the séance begins, the medium shows the sitters a metal trumpet, which can be thoroughly examined, for there is only one unusual thing about it—the outer rim; this has been painted with luminous paint so that it may be seen in the dark.

Now, the easiest way of disguising the voice is with the aid of a cylinder of some kind; it does not matter much of what the cylinder is made. Even a paper cylinder will



answer the purpose quite well; with a glass or metal cylinder the feat is extremely simple, and with the aid of the trumpet, therefore, the medium is easily able to produce several different voices.

When this part of the séance is over, the trumpet apparently floats about the room and comes quite close to the faces of the sitters. Finally, it returns to the medium, and when the lights are turned up at the conclusion of the séance, it is seen lying on the medium's knees. If any of the sitters wish to examine the mysterious trumpet once more, they are quite at liberty to do so.

This very effective trick is performed in the simplest way. The "medium" has a number of flexible rods concealed in a special pocket down one leg of his trousers. To cause the trumpet to float about the room, all that the medium has to do is to take two or three rods from his concealed pocket, fit them into the trumpet, and wave it about. The rods cannot be seen in the dark; in fact, the luminous paint on the rim of the trumpet acts as a "blinder," and makes the greater part of the trumpet invisible in the darkness.

Another trick often practised by fraudulent mediums is that of reading in the dark.

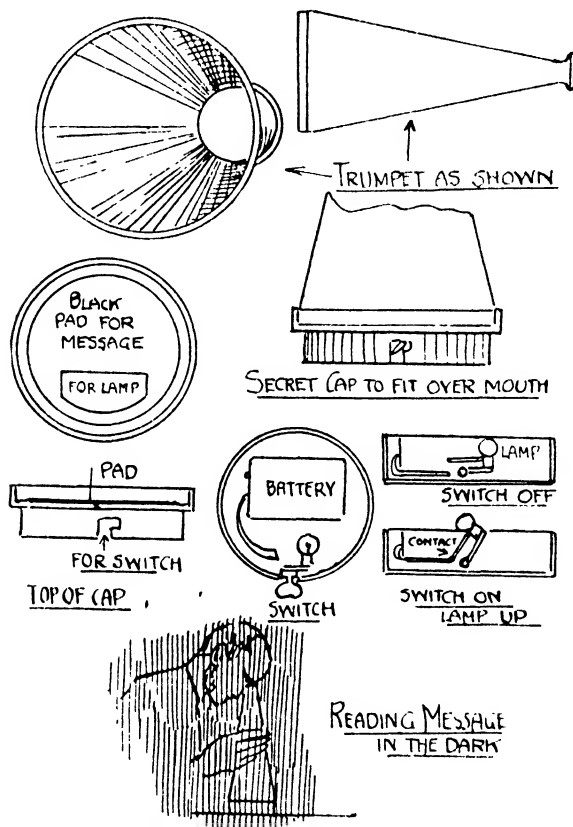
As in the previous trick a large metal trumpet is shown, and may be examined by everyone. One of the sitters is then asked to write a question or a short message on a slip of paper and to retain it for a few moments.

The lights are turned out, and in due course "spirit voices" are heard; it is almost needless to say that the medium is responsible for these voices, and that the trumpet is of real assistance to him in the manner I have just explained.

The medium next takes the written message and places it on his table. It must be remembered that the room is in total darkness. In due course the medium reads out the message or question in a disguised voice and replies to it. When the lights are turned up the trumpet can again be examined.

Concealed under the table-cloth—or in any other way that is convenient to the medium—is a metal cap which

fits closely over the mouth of the trumpet. The cap has a small pad at the top of it, with a little battery concealed under the pad, in which there is a small slit. To read the message, the medium merely has to put the trumpet down over the cap and switch on the light. The trumpet hides the light from the audience, but the medium, with his eye



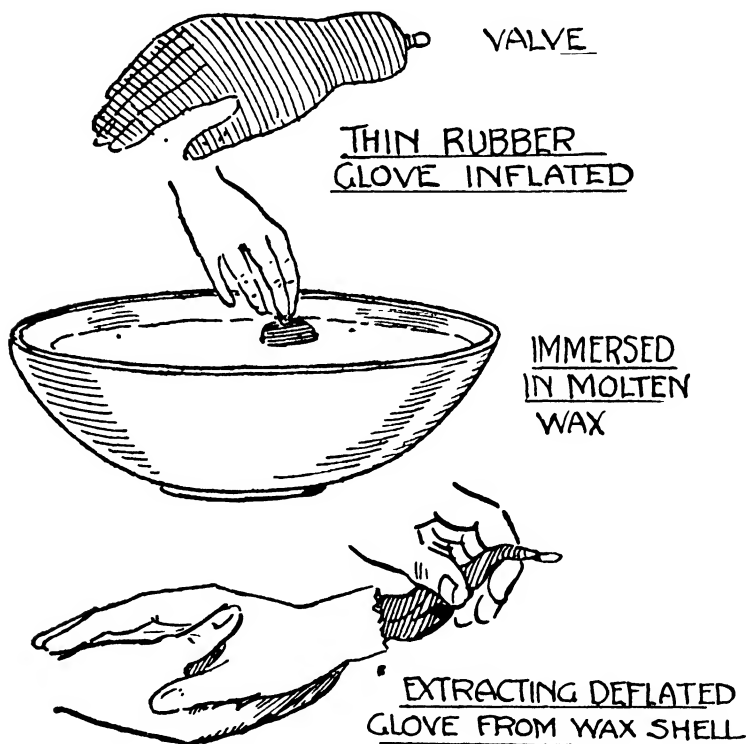
to the top of the trumpet, can look down it and read the message. He then switches off the light, picks up the trumpet, leaving the cap in the concealed position, and holds the paper in his hand. The swindle is over, but the medium does not hurry matters, and when the lights are turned up he is seen to be in a trance (?), with the paper in his hand and the trumpet on his knees.

This is always a very convincing test for those who are

foolish enough to pay fees to a bogus medium, for the question naturally arises, how can any man read a message in the dark ? To that question I have now given you an answer.

The wax hand which is sometimes used by bogus mediums to deceive sitters is a particularly clever swindle.

If a human hand is placed in a bowl of molten wax and



withdrawn with the wax on it, there is a very good model of a wax hand, so long as the living hand is inside it. But how is the hand to be withdrawn without breaking up the wax cast ? The bogus medium uses this question as an argument for the presence of a spirit hand. But, as a matter of fact, the little mystery is easily explained.

The medium provides himself with a thin rubber glove, a well made one, complete in every detail. A valve is fitted into the wrist of the glove, and after the glove has

been inflated until it has the appearance of a human hand, it is put in the bowl of wax and withdrawn. Then all that is necessary is to let out the air and take the glove out of the wax cast. So easy !

Needless to say, fraudulent mediums are well aware that if they are not very careful their tricks may be discovered, and they are always trying to improve on their methods and to invent new ones.

## CHAPTER XI

### WHY I AM A SPIRITUALIST

**M**Y profound belief in Spiritualism—or survivalism, as it should be more properly called—is still, it seems, a matter of wonderment to many of my professional friends and to the British public at large. Scarcely a day passes but I receive a letter or letters pointing out the error of my ways, or my faithlessness to the magical cause, or even roundly accusing me of using my magical knowledge to further the practices of bogus mediums!

It was Houdini and John Nevil Maskelyne between them who founded the principle that the forces of magic and the forces of Spiritualism are ruthlessly opposed. I need not discuss here what motives impelled them towards this end; it is sufficient that they established this idea in the minds of their followers and opponents, and, what is considerably more important, in the mind of the public.

Times have altered, of course. For more than a quarter of a century past I have endeavoured to show that there is no parallel to be drawn between magic and Spiritualism, except in the case of the bogus “medium.” Where fraud is concerned, a knowledge of magical principles not only is useful—it is an absolute necessity. And it pleases me to believe that my efforts in investigating, and sometimes exposing, the claims of fraudulent mediums are gradually breaking down that barrier which Houdini and Maskelyne so thoroughly set up.

None the less, tradition dies hard. Belief in Spiritualism has grown enormously, but there are millions of people who have yet to be convinced that psychic phenomena are not a certain glorified form of magic. Some magicians foster this idea, for there is more than one way of turning it to profitable account; and it must be said that, in some

instances, at least, Spiritualists themselves are responsible. As a result of her experiences at the hands of Houdini, no less a spirit medium than Mrs. Margery Crandon ("Margery C."), of Boston, Massachusetts, obstinately refuses to permit the presence of a magician at her séances. If one who has not had the opportunity to investigate her phenomena be permitted an opinion, Mrs. Crandon has absolutely nothing to fear from magicians, either as individuals or as a body. Her attitude seems scarcely worthy of the greatness of her cause.

My interest in the question of survival was first aroused at the beginning of this century by a professional colleague. In 1904 I completed a music-hall tour of Great Britain with an act intriguingly termed the *Black Art Illusions*. A Scots hypnotist named St. Armande made me an offer for my magical apparatus, and while we were discussing the terms of sale, he introduced the subject of Spiritualism.

I was inclined to scepticism. For one thing, I did not know St. Armande particularly well, and—I was a magician. John Nevil Maskelyne had already fired some arrows at the spiritualistic bull, and there was no doubt that he influenced me. But I could not escape the fact that St. Armande was also a magician of considerable ability—and he believed. The upshot of it was that, at his invitation I accompanied him to a Spiritualistic lecture at a Glasgow hall.

I cannot recall the name of the clairvoyant medium who presided at the meeting. His performance was such as can be seen at any Spiritualistic church at the present time—a lecture followed by messages for certain selected people in the congregation. The simplicity of the general procedure interested me, but I was not greatly impressed.

A week or so later I attended a service in my home town, at Daulby Hall, in Liverpool. On this occasion a woman medium presided, and I set her down as an hysterical old dodderer. Throughout the whole meeting I was suppressing an intense desire to laugh. On returning home I recounted the proceedings at length to a friend.

Now my friend was not a fool. He was a young man, one of the finest chess players in Great Britain, and in a

considerable way of business in Liverpool. He told me quietly that he would like to attend such a meeting as I had humorously described. The following Sunday we went together, and, to my surprise, the medium had a message for us, or, more correctly, for my friend. She warned him to be prepared for a great change in life ; in a matter of months he would be married, give up his business in Liverpool, and take up life, under entirely new conditions, in a certain town in Lancashire. Before the year was out, my friend *was* married ; he had forsaken his £400 a year post, and gone into partnership in his father-in-law's business.

Was that *guesswork* by the medium ? If so, it was an extraordinarily long shot, involving a risk she need never have taken. I ceased to laugh, and devoted myself to some hard thinking. I persuaded my father to attend the hall ; and he put it down as "work of the devil" when the medium accurately described his mother, and a peculiar lozenge-shaped brooch she was wearing. In her arms she held a baby which seemed to bear a remarkable resemblance to my father. At a subsequent meeting, a description of a similar personal nature was given to my wife, and identified by her.

If I was still unconvinced by the truth of Spiritualism, I had decided, at any rate, that it was unfair to deride it without making a long and unbiased investigation into its claims. There came one day to Liverpool a blind medium named Anderson, who claimed that he could levitate a heavy table to ceiling height in full light. There were thirteen sitters at his first séance (admitted, I remember, at sixpence each). The money made me suspicious, but the phenomena astounded me. We sat round a large oak table of the type usually associated with board-rooms. In spite of a downward pressure from twenty-six hands, the table was wrenched from our grasp, and hung, without a support or wires of any kind, above our heads.

Before a second séance by Anderson, I made a thorough examination of the room, and of the carpet on which the table stood. There were no wires or "properties" of any kind. Anderson was much annoyed with me, although, so far as I knew, neither he nor any of the sitters was aware



WILL GOLDSTON SHOWING STUDENT MEMBERS OF THE MAGICIANS' CLUB A NEW TRICK





of my examination. On this occasion, he directed a fat man to lie full length on the table. Anderson stood on the man's body, stamping on his chest and stomach with heavy hobnail boots ; and, once again, the table, with its two passengers, was lifted from our fingers, until the medium was forced to bend his neck to prevent his head hitting the ceiling. The fat man assured me that he had suffered no pain from the force of Anderson's boots.

In spite of that extraordinary experience I was by no means a convinced Spiritualist. But my magical instincts were aroused by the phenomena which I had witnessed. If magic it was, then under the guise of this survivalism was such magic as defied the full resources of my professional ingenuity. Still, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that I had been tricked—in some such way, perhaps, as the Davenport brothers had tricked their colleagues but a few years previously.

I purchased a planchette, and to my great astonishment, almost immediately received a number of beautifully written messages. It was not, at any rate, possible to trick myself. Planchette assured me that I was a natural "automatic writer." I was surprised, but not flattered. I wanted proof, and some tangible demonstration of my usefulness as such. It was not long in coming. One evening, in the seclusion of my study, I received a long account of the unhappiness of a certain young lady acquaintance of mine. Her suicide was prophesied three weeks exactly from that date. I should have warned her, perhaps—but what was the use ? I still doubted whether planchette could tell the truth regarding the past, much less foretell the future. But in three weeks my friend died from the effects of a self-administered poison.

From that moment I became an ardent Spiritualist. No experience of mine has shaken that faith in the truth of human survival. It is a faith which shines crystal clear in my philosophies of life ; it has profoundly affected my outlook on the world and my attitude towards my fellow-men. Whether I am a better man for it is not for me to say—but if I am not, then the fault is wholly mine.

I made astoundingly swift progress as an automatic

writer. Very soon I was able to forsake the planchette and obtain my messages simply by holding a pencil in my fingers and allowing my wrist to rest on a sheet of blank paper. In this manner I made an assignation with a deceased sister. She promised to speak to me in my bedroom one night at twelve o'clock. Hers was the first spirit voice I ever heard, and it frightened me so much that I begged it to depart. That was a quarter of a century ago, and although I have heard hundreds of spirit voices since then, I have never again heard my sister. I often wonder why.

## CHAPTER XII

### MEDIUMS I HAVE SAT WITH

**I**N communicating with our physical world, disembodied spirits (except in certain specialised instances) are compelled to work through the physical means of their mediums' bodies. This must appear to be something of a handicap, and indeed it is. Spiritual communication is largely in our own hands. Unless we prove willing to lend our minds and our bodies readily and with sympathy, friendly communication would practically cease to exist. Communication there would probably be, but of such a type that we should neither desire nor understand it.

The human mind works in a multitude of ways, and because of it the handicap imposed on spirit communication is not so great as it would first appear. It is actually possible to communicate in many different ways, and the psychic qualities of a single medium may be such that he or she provides the means of two or three entirely different methods of communication. There are also, of course, many kinds of spirit mediums—the clairvoyant, the direct voice, the materialising, the photographic, and so on.

In compiling this record of some of the mediums with whom I have sat during the last twenty-five years, I have endeavoured to be as comprehensive of these types as possible. Further, it has been my object to set down the facts purely as I observed them, entirely uncoloured with biased description. Although I admit to a faith in Spiritualism, for years past I have attended séances only in the rôle of a psychic investigator, and it is in this same rôle that I shall recount this part of my story.

#### CECIL HUSK

As I have already explained, it was a blind man, Anderson, who first demonstrated to me the enormous forces of

psychic phenomena, and set me thinking in a new way of Spiritualism and all that it stood for. It was a blind man, too, who all but killed my new-born faith.

This man was Cecil Husk. About the year 1906, Husk had established a big reputation as a "materialising" medium—that is, through certain properties of his body, spirits were able to assume for a few moments their old bodily shape. A magical colleague named Moon told me that every Friday evening he was able, through Husk, to speak to the materialised spirit of his daughter. I expressed a strong desire to meet Husk, and this was eventually arranged.

Before the séance, I joined a number of other sitters—about a dozen in all—in the sitting-room of Husk's London home. They were all most enthusiastic, and spoke in superlative terms of the medium's powers. It appeared that his "control"—the spirit which assumed responsibility for the body during the period of trance—was not always the same. On the last occasion, it had been Joe Grimaldi, the famous clown of other days. Joe had enlivened the proceedings with a number of anecdotes and comic songs.

We were conducted to another, and much larger, room. The lights were extinguished, and almost immediately a musical box, which I had observed in the centre of the floor, rose into the air, giving out its tinkling tunes. Observable by reason of its streaks of phosphorous paint, it swung up towards the ceiling, keeping time with itself by tapping on the walls. It ceased to tap, and disappeared completely. Then we heard it playing again—above our heads, and *outside the room*.

The "control's" voice spoke in light-hearted encouragement. It gave way to another voice, and another. Then we were given a "materialisation"—a man. It struck me at once that Husk's face and that of the "spirit" were remarkably alike. Yet I asked no questions. Finally, when the lights were put on again, I noticed on Husk's wrist a thick iron band or bracelet, very tight to the skin. This, I was assured, had been placed on him by a spirit during a séance, and such a close fit was it that he was scarcely able to move it a quarter of an inch.

That iron bracelet intrigued me ; I mentioned it a day or two later to J. N. Maskelyne. After a few minutes' reflection, Maskelyne showed me how it could be fitted to the wrist. A ring of soft metal can be hammered flat enough to permit the insertion of a hand. Once the ring is secured on the wrist, it can be hammered back to its original shape. I proved this by trying it on myself.

The next time I visited Husk, I took with me Georgie Leno, Dan Leno's eldest daughter. When I suggested she should accompany me, Georgie only smiled and asked me for an automatic message. This I obtained for her in her presence. It was from her father, supplying the address of an old friend in dire straits at Brighton, and begging Georgie to make some arrangements for the poor woman's comfort. The confirmation of this message so impressed Georgie that she agreed to visit Husk.

We learned on arrival that Dan Leno had appeared at the séance in the previous week. Nevertheless, he did not appear to us, in spite of the presence of so near a relative as Georgie. She, like myself, was disappointed. We listened to the musical box, and saw two or three not very convincing "materialisations." The phenomena, indeed, seemed but a sketchy reproduction of what I had seen before.

On my third visit, I went with another theatrical friend, Finlay Dunn. This time, I was fortunate enough to see the "materialisation" of a brother who had passed away in India. A white, shrouded head hovered before me. On a natural impulse I leant from my seat to get a closer view. There was no doubt, to my mind, that the face I saw was Husk's. It appeared to be covered with a fine gauze—so fine that, as I looked through it, I could clearly see that the artificial moustache lacked a sufficiency of spirit gum, and was drooping at one end. I made my observations known there and then. The séance broke up in a good deal of confusion.

Let me explain that I do not deny that Husk was possessed of genuine mediumistic powers. He may well have been. There have been others who have "helped out" their genuine powers by trickery. Yet the longer I recall

the case of Husk, the less certain do I seem of *any* of his phenomena. He had once been a professional vocalist, and knew something of voice control. Undoubtedly he knew a good deal of magic. That—and the darkness—are the only weapons that the fraudulent “medium” needs.

MRS. “Z”

Not long after my experience with Husk, I learned of a certain Mrs. “Z”, a woman reputed to be possessed of extraordinary powers of psychometry. This was a branch of phenomena of which I knew but little, and I arranged with Harry Clyo, a well-known music-hall artiste of those days, to visit Mrs. “Z’s” humble sitting-room in the Waterloo Bridge Road.

The sitting—if sitting it could be called—was the shortest and the most dramatic I have ever experienced. After Clyo and I had paid our fee of five shillings each, I handed Mrs. “Z” an ordinary propelling pencil. She closed her eyes and told me something of the pencil’s former history. Some of her statements were curiously near the truth; others I had no means of confirming. It was interesting, I thought, but hardly strong enough to earn conviction.

Clyo, in his turn, drew from his pocket a two-bladed penknife of very common appearance. Mrs. “Z” took it and closed her eyes—almost in the same instant she flung it across the room with a terrifying scream. Her face turned the colour of old parchment: she held her head in her hands and rocked stupidly to and fro in her chair. I have never seen a woman in more abject terror.

“It is—blood!” she said, gaspingly. “It was used, that knife—for suicide. A man’s throat, and—oh, blood, blood, blood!”

Her disjointed explanation was, in fact, literally true. Harry Clyo’s partner (they worked the music-halls under the name of “The Two Rows”), had, but a few months previously, cut his throat; and the knife he used was that which had been proffered to Mrs. “Z.”

## MRS. SANDS

In spiritualistic circles the crystal ball as an instrument of clairvoyance has lost much of its popularity. The adoption of the crystal amongst charlatans and professional "fortune-tellers" is really responsible. Yet I have known, and still know, a number of genuine mediums who procure their clairvoyant visions through crystal-gazing. The theory behind the process is easy enough to understand. By concentrating on the ball, the medium shuts the doors of his conscious mind, so to speak, and the visions which he thereby conjures up actually have the appearance of passing through the glass sphere. It is a form of phenomena which is closely allied to psychometry.

Fifteen years ago, a certain Mrs. Sands built up a considerable reputation for herself among Spiritualists as a crystal-gazing clairvoyante. Talk of the lady interested me, and I made an appointment to visit her flat.

The fee she demanded was ten shillings—which, in view of her reputation, was reasonable enough. I was conducted by her daughter, a very pretty girl of eighteen or nineteen, to a room artistically draped with dark curtains. There, at a table, sat Mrs. Sands. On the table was the most perfect crystal I have ever seen. It was grasped in a black-gloved hand, and even in the dim light of that well-remembered room, it sparkled with a daylight purity.

The daughter left us, and I pulled up a chair to the table. Mrs. Sands enjoined me to silence, and passed her hands through the air above the ball. Very soon her vision came, and she gave me some general advice as to my future welfare. Then an astounding thing happened. I am not clairvoyant, and at that moment I was rather more taken up with the medium herself than with the ball into which she was gazing. Yet as my glance fell on the crystal I saw, quite clearly, a picture of what was undoubtedly blue and white sky. For a few brief seconds I was dumbfounded. The picture moved; a tree passed slowly, gracefully through the ball; and then a street.

Directly I saw the street I knew I was being victimized. It was the same street through which I had passed



but a quarter of an hour before on my way to the flat. I realised, too, the general procedure of the fraud. It was amazingly clever, and was done by an ingenious system of mirrors, so placed that the images of objects exterior to the house were thrown into the crystal. A slow turning of the mirrors—and doubtless the daughter was responsible for that—procured the effect of an ever-moving “vision.” A similar effect may be seen in the “camera obscura,” worked on the same principle of reflection, which even to-day is an attraction at various seaside resorts.

Mrs. Sands became most indignant when I explained just how much I knew of her method of “clairvoyance.” She became tearful and offered to return my ten shillings. This I politely refused, but took instead the carved hand and the wonderful ball which it held in its slim begloved fingers. Quite recently I presented them to the New York Museum of the Society of American Magicians.

My experiences with Mrs. Sands, following closely on my exposure of Husk, greatly discouraged me in my enquiries, and I resolved to have no further dealings with professional mediums. For all that, I was still an enthusiastic Spiritualist. For a number of years I conducted séances in my own home, and obtained a good deal of encouragement from my efforts as an automatic writer.

I kept my resolution until eight years ago. It was then that I met that very capable man, Dennis Bradley. Bradley assured me that he was a direct voice medium of such power that, on suitable occasions, it was possible to hear two voices speaking simultaneously, simply by pressing one’s ear to the centre of his back. He had developed through the well-known “finger-print” medium, Valiantine. Incidentally, the fact that Valiantine should seek to reinforce his natural mediumship with trickery (some “spirit” thumb prints were made actually by Valiantine’s toes) is one of the great tragedies of the survivalist cause. It was Bradley who was responsible for the exposure.

Through the influence of Bradley (and my good friend, Hannen Swaffer), I determined once again to lend my knowledge of magic to the advancement of Spiritualism. So long as there are fraudulent “mediums” in existence,

Spiritualism must suffer, and as the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made abundantly clear, it is to the interest of every Spiritualist to clear the weeds of deceit and fraud from the path of his cause. Shortly afterwards I was enlisted as an honorary member of the Research Council of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research. Still more recently—in 1931—I instituted a similar body for psychic investigation under the auspices of the Magicians' Club of London.

### ARCHIBALD ADAMS

Archibald Adams is a name inevitably linked up with war-time memory. Such songs as "The Bells of St. Mary's" and "God send you back to me," which established Adams in the first rank of British ballad composers, are a vital part of our recollections of early war days.

Now Adams is a medium of most extraordinary powers. Also, be it noted, he is one of the very few people of psychic gifts who is not a Spiritualist. He gives one the impression of being but mildly interested in the phenomena for which he is responsible. He does not attempt to explain it. So far as he is concerned, it just happens—and that is all there is to it. I fancy he is rather amused by himself.

I had heard much about Adams's powers, but it was not until the autumn of 1928 that I was enabled to witness them. A few theatrical people, including Adams, had gathered at Hannen Swaffer's flat in St. Martin's Lane.

Although some amongst us were Spiritualists, it had not been Swaffer's intention to conduct a séance. We were a social gathering, pure and simple. The room was brilliantly lit by electric light; there were the usual little chattering groups of men and women, the tinkle of glasses and plates.

Suddenly, above the hum of conversation, sounded a rap, clear and distinct, against the open door. Not a soul was standing within arm's reach of it. Another rap came, and another. Soon they were to be heard all over the room, from the walls, from the ceiling. Curiously, nobody seemed frightened or in any way disturbed by this somewhat haphazard phenomenon. I think we were all too

interested to know what was going to happen next to seek an immediate explanation of it.

Across one corner of the room stood a massive upright piano. We were startled to see this start swaying. It pivoted from one end with a see-saw motion, gaining added impetus with each swing. Indeed, so great did the swings become, that if the piano had been controlled by the ordinary laws of mechanics, it must have tilted completely over and gone crashing to the ground.

Nor was that all. On top of the piano was a tall Oriental vase. This, of course, should have slipped from the tilted, shiny surface. It did nothing of the sort. As the piano swung forward, so the vase swung backward, finding equilibrium in balancing on a single point of its base.

Adams, sitting in a chair, watched these happenings as an ordinary spectator. Apart from what appeared to be a slight air of embarrassment—due, no doubt, to the fact that his mediumship should assert itself in the middle of a social function—his attitude seemed normal in every way. He lacked even that certain air of mysticism which, rightly or wrongly, is attributed by many to the presence of a psychic control.

The explanation of the phenomena produced through Adams, considering all the circumstances under which they occurred, must be largely a matter for personal opinion. Certain it was that trickery of any sort was impossible. And it is my opinion that if Adams had devoted himself to a thorough exploitation of his gifts of mediumship—not necessarily as a Spiritualist, but purely as an agent of psychic force—he would have proved one of the greatest mediums the world has ever known.

#### MISS HAZEL RIDLEY

“Direct-voice” séances are exactly what the description implies—séances in which the sitters are addressed by the actual voice of a spirit or spirits. This may be done by the spirit occupying the medium’s body, and using his or her lungs and vocal chords for the production of its (the

spirit's) voice. Or, alternatively, the spirit may build up from the "ectoplasm" of the medium's body vocal chords of its own. This second method, although used quite frequently, is the rarer: usually complete darkness is necessary, and the spirit speaker adds further to his power by the use of a trumpet. The trumpet (denoted in the darkness by spots of luminous paint) moves about the room, so that a voice may whisper confidentially into a sitter's ear, or boom unexpectedly from a point in the vicinity of the ceiling.

In August, 1931, I was invited to attend a séance given by a well-known American medium, Hazel Ridley, at the headquarters of the Marylebone Spiritualist Association. The lady in question was a direct-voice medium of the first type I have described.

The sitting was held during an afternoon. The curtains of the window were drawn, but allowed sufficient light in the room clearly to discern the medium, and the seven or eight other sitters. Miss Ridley went into trance in the ordinary way, and almost immediately began to speak in a heavy masculine voice.

In the course of the next half hour the tone and timbre of her voice changed four or five times. Now it was that of a man, now a lisping child, now a contralto woman, and so on, addressed in turn to each of the sitters. Some of the information provided by these voices seemed extraordinarily accurate. One man was reminded that he had lost a pound note that very morning. He agreed also that he had eventually found the note. "You had two wallets," said the voice. "In searching the newer, you missed your note, and it was not until half an hour later that you thought to search the old wallet in another suit."

A woman sitter confirmed the fact that shortly she proposed to travel to Cheltenham, and thence to Glasgow. The voice advised her to proceed direct to Glasgow. A further piece of advice was to sell immediately a certain property which she possessed, as by retaining it she would invite a heavy financial loss. I cannot say whether this counsel proved to her advantage.

In my turn, I was addressed by a spirit which was

apparently that of a child. I must admit that our conversation was singularly unsatisfactory, and—to me—unconvincing. Many of the words I was unable to hear, so blurred and furry were the syllables. The voice claimed recognition of me, and was surprised that I could not reciprocate. It mentioned the word “Liverpool”—my home town. I asked the name of the spirit, and it emitted a curious sort of whistling noise that seemed absolutely meaningless. I asked again in what manner we had previously met on earth. The answer was “Through your brother.” I have several brothers. I pressed for further details—and was rewarded with a sound that seemed suspiciously like “Ha ! ha ! ha !” If the joke was on me on that occasion, I certainly failed to see it.

#### RUDI SCHNEIDER

Rudi Schneider is one of the most human, as well as one of the most famous, of present-day spirit mediums. He is a young Austrian motor mechanic, now in the very early twenties, and not greatly interested in Spiritualism. He once told me that his main interests in life are his sweetheart, his trade, and Association football. When he was in England he was far more concerned with the doings of football teams in the English Leagues than in his spirit guide, a dancing lady of the name of “Olga.” He speaks German, but his knowledge of English is limited to a bare score of words.

Schneider’s sésances, held at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research in December, 1929, attracted wide attention. I found it impossible to attend a sitting for which I had been appointed, and so great was the demand for places that it seemed I should be denied a further opportunity. When Lord Charles Hope heard of my disappointment, however, he gave me his own seat.

Although I attended Schneider’s sésance in an unofficial capacity, I was particularly anxious to satisfy myself as to his claims—or, more correctly, the claims made on his behalf. I arrived at the sésance room an hour before the sitting was due, and made a thorough examination of the

fittings and apparatus. There were no trap doors ; the walls were solid. The cabinet consisted of two curtains drawn across one corner of the room, and they screened off an ordinary wooden chair and a red electric lamp bulb hanging by flex from the ceiling. In front of the cabinet were a small stool and a waste-paper basket. In addition, four long ribbons, the purport of which I did not immediately grasp, were attached to the curtains.

An ingenious electrical safety device had been fitted up by Harry Price, honorary director of the Laboratory. By joining hands the sitters formed a circuit. If this circuit was broken (by unclasping the hands, or even through a movement of the feet), one or more of half a dozen red lamps fitted into the wall was extinguished. This device, so far as my knowledge took me, was in perfect order.

There were nine sitters in all. Two young medical students searched and examined Schneider (who was dressed only in pyjamas), and expressed themselves satisfied. To my surprise, Schneider did not take his place in the cabinet, but sat on a chair outside it. He was grasped by Price, and the rest of us made up the circle by joining hands. In this way both Price and Schneider were included in the electrical circuit.

The illumination from the lamps made observation a simple matter. Almost as soon as we sat down Schneider was in trance. He breathed very heavily, as though he were undergoing a great physical strain, and emitted a curious continuous sound, something like the softened whistling of a circular saw.

For an hour nothing happened. We whiled away the time by the playing of gramophone records, mostly dance tunes. At last "Olga" was heard, but it was obvious to me that it was a man's voice and not a woman's that was speaking. The explanation, apparently, was that "Olga" was speaking through the agency of Schneider's vocal organs.

The voice spoke for a short while in German, and I was able to follow it perfectly. Since no phenomena followed, however, it was suggested that we should have an interval of ten minutes to allow the control to gather strength.

Schneider, on coming from the trance, seemed extremely tired. I was the last to leave the séance room, and the first to enter it on our return.

But again we were disappointed. The second sitting, which lasted fifty minutes, was a repetition of the first. The voice spoke—rather more frequently now—but of phenomena there were none. So again we adjourned.

At the third attempt we were rewarded.

The paper basket, which was painted with phosphorus, had been placed on top of the stool outside the cabinet. Both basket and stool suddenly moved towards us with a strange, circular movement, and then toppled over. At the same instant there was a most uncanny gust of wind, colder than anything I have ever experienced. The curtains of the cabinet flew violently apart, and the four ribbons stood out almost straight. Occasionally they sagged and flapped, much as a banner does when caught by a strong breeze. But the most peculiar thing was the ruby lamp and the flex hanging in the centre of the cabinet. The flex projected from the curtains at an acute angle, as stiff as if it were fashioned from steel. The lamp twisted in a small circle, and then swung neatly back into the cabinet.

Next we heard a number of raps. Somebody said: "Give us nine, please," and this was done. Immediately the room was filled by a terrific sledge-hammer thumping. Yet, curiously, the room did not vibrate in the least, and it was quite impossible to tell whence the sounds emanated. They filled the atmosphere, yet came from nowhere. That was the exact impression they conveyed.

Now for the fourth time we adjourned, and again reassembled. "Olga" asked if we had enjoyed the manifestations, and on receiving our agreement, promised to show us something "even more wonderful."

We waited. Nothing happened. "Olga" complained that her "power" was weakening. Still we waited. At length she suggested that as the time was approaching midnight, it would be as well to terminate the séance. This seemed a poor anti-climax.

Schneider was very tired, but for a short while I

persuaded him to let me show him a few simple sleight-of-hand tricks. This I did to discover, if possible, his knowledge of conjuring. Certain it was that he knew nothing of the principle of "mis-direction," for he followed my movements with the eyes of a child.

## ERTO

In the phenomena that he produces, Erto, the Italian, is unique, not only among contemporary mediums, but in the whole history of psychic research. For want of a better name, I must call him a "flash-light" medium. His control or controls specialise in a dazzling production of lights.

Harry Price once sent me a hasty summons to attend an Erto sitting at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, in my capacity as an honorary member of the Research Council. I had learned that Erto was a manufacturing chemist by trade, and in view of the nature of his phenomena, I had determined that a certain additional caution was necessary. About sixteen people were present, including Professor C. E. M. Joad, and an Italian doctor, a friend of the medium.

The room was thrown into darkness, and Erto went into trance. A very deep "guide" voice addressed us in a language which none present could understand. I assumed at first that this must be Italian, but the doctor informed me that if this were so, it must be a most ancient and primitive form of the language, since he also was ignorant of it. I was particularly struck by the medium's heavy breathing while the voice was speaking.

Very soon a startling flash appeared above the medium's head; it was the signal for a general onslaught of flashes. They appeared all over the room, against the ceiling far from the medium, by the walls, and in the floor corners. The general nature of their colour seemed to be a brilliant blend of yellow and red, and although this general aspect persisted throughout the sitting, sometimes it was the red tinge which appeared to predominate slightly, and sometimes the yellow. The flashes were not, I suppose, of any



great strength, since it was possible to watch them with the unprotected eye, but they certainly threw the sitters and the medium in strong relief against the darkness. Sometimes, as though the psychic energy of the flashes was waning a little, they would give way to a curious yellow-whitish glare, such as might be thrown from a miniature flood-light. When, as a final test, the medium's hands were locked in two small boxes, the flashes ceased to appear.

The sitting lasted for the better part of two hours. On my suggestion Erto subsequently stripped himself nude in Price's private room. His body and clothes were examined, but nothing was discovered which could arouse the slightest degree of suspicion.

Yet I was far from satisfied. Erto had shown us something so amazingly different in phenomena that I felt, in common with other witnesses, that he should submit himself to a second, and perhaps a third and fourth, examination. I wanted, too, to comprehend the meaning of those flashes. After all, what we had seen seemed nothing better than a miniature firework show, without fireworks. It was baffling. I discussed the séance with Joad later in the evening, and he agreed that some further investigations should be made.

That, unfortunately, proved impracticable, for Erto was due to return to the Continent. I am still undecided about him. But there is this point worthy of note. On the day following the séance, Price discovered a number of tiny flints on the carpet of the room in which Erto had been stripped. At a subsequent séance in Paris, Erto was placed in a bath while his clothes were examined. In the bath a number of very similar flints was found.

I do not know if these flints were consciously used for the production of the mysterious flashes. If they were, I cannot understand in what manner they were used. None the less, their presence must arouse suspicion. But until this interesting Italian visits this country once more, it would be both unwise and unjust to come to any definite opinion regarding the nature of Erto's phenomena, or his value to the Spiritualist cause.





## MRS. DUNCAN

With the possible exception of Mrs. Margery Crandon, no medium of recent years has created more controversy than Mrs. Duncan. It was little more than two years ago when this smiling, middle-aged Scotswoman first attracted public attention through the strength of her psychic powers. She has been denounced already as a swindler by my friend Harry Price ; yet there are many investigators, to say nothing of a large number of staunch Spiritualists, who are prepared to declare on oath that she is genuine.

Mrs. Duncan is a materialising medium—she produces ectoplasmic spirit forms. Now, according to Harry Price, who has compiled a whole volume on the nature of Mrs. Duncan's "trickery," this woman is possessed of a remarkable and very rare power of regurgitation. Prior to a séance, says Price, Mrs. Duncan swallows a number of yards of tightly packed cheese-cloth. In the secrecy of her medium's cabinet she regurgitates this from her stomach, and shapes it into human likenesses. This cheese-cloth, in fact, is the basis of the spirit "materialisations."

I am not one of those blind believers who scoff at Price. He is a just and honest man, and, in his own mind, firmly convinced that Mrs. Duncan is a charlatan. Also, he is a widely experienced psychic investigator. None the less, it would be unfair, I decided, to condemn Mrs. Duncan on Price's verdict alone. Price, being human, may be mistaken.

The first sitting I attended with Mrs. Duncan was in March, 1931, at a house in North London. For once in a way I went, not as an investigator, but as a privileged spectator. I asked no questions of the medium, made no stipulations.

About a dozen people were present. The medium's cabinet was simply two curtains drawn across a corner of the room. It seemed but a moment after Mrs. Duncan had entered the cabinet that she was in trance. "Albert," her "guide," addressed us, as is usual. Then the spirit forms began to appear, one by one.

They were of both sexes, of varying ages and sizes, and

eight in number. Each one spoke with a clearly individualised voice, compatible with its appearance. One or two came to the edge of the cabinet and stayed there; others actually walked from the cabinet into the room. A number of sitters claimed recognition of the forms: this, at any rate, was not outside possibility, since we were sitting in a ruby light which permitted visibility. The material from which the figures were formed was grey-white in colour (so far as one could tell in the red light) and possessed of a definite sheen of phosphorescence.

Towards the end of the sitting I had a most unusual experience. A small female form appeared at the edge of the cabinet. She told me her name was Violet, and that she had been all day with me in my office. She was eight years old, but had died very shortly after birth. There was a message for me, but the presence of the other sitters seemed to embarrass her. I took a pencil and paper from my pocket . . . and this spirit child *took them from me and wrote*. I asked her then if, for one moment, she would place her hand in mine. She did so. The hand was soft and definitely fleshlike to the touch.

When next I attended on Mrs. Duncan, it was in the position of an examiner. It is useless to disguise the fact that I was terribly disappointed in this test séance. Perhaps my former experience had led me to hope for too much.

I made a thorough inspection of the room and of the cabinet. Everything appeared in order. As before, "Albert" addressed us, but the forms which materialised were vague and shadowy, even from my seat two feet away from the cabinet. I had been warned earlier that an old friend of mine was likely to manifest himself. Something appeared, but to me the form was quite unrecognisable. I put a question to it, but it gave back no answer. Presently it withdrew into the cabinet, and a few seconds later a scrap of paper fluttered from the curtains to my feet. On it was written a single word: "Lafayette."

Later in the evening I had arranged to handcuff and bind Mrs. Duncan when, to my chagrin, I found that the right hand manacle of my carefully prepared cuffs refused

to work. I made the best of a bad job, and used the remaining manacle and a long length of rope to secure the medium's wrists. I tied the thumbs with carpet thread, in order to prevent manipulation.

"Albert," the guide, came through at once, apologising for meddling with the cuffs. He promised that Mrs. Duncan should be released in a very short time. In little more than three minutes by my watch, the lady walked from the cabinet.

In full light I have seen Mrs. Duncan produce writing on a blank slate. Here again, however, I was disappointed. The procedure is to hold the slate, with the pencil on it, out of sight beneath the table surface. The other hand is in full view on the table. I must say, in all honesty, that I could produce such "spirit" writing, with little practice, by trick methods. John Nevil Maskelyne once did it in a police court, with the slate held in sight, and but a few feet from the inquisitive gaze of the magistrate.

I intend to see more of Mrs. Duncan, for she is, I am convinced, a medium of much power. How much I do not know. That is what I am anxious to discover.

#### JONES, THE HEALING MEDIUM

Four years ago I was a sick man. For some months I had been suffering from what is popularly known as an "inflamed appendix," and my mental alertness and general health had suffered in consequence. Of course, I saw a doctor. His advice, in a nutshell, was that I should have the appendix removed before the inflammation gave rise to an abscess. Now, my constitution had already been severely weakened by a serious operation a few years previously, and I feared that the removal of my appendix would not prove so simple a matter as my advisor assured me.

So I saw another doctor, and another, and then a specialist; and always the advice was the same—to undergo the operation.

In these days, of course, the operation for appendicitis is not considered a serious one, and I had almost made up my

mind to consent to it. Whilst, however, I was still wrestling with a few remaining doubts, I happened to run into an old friend in the street outside my office. He told me, in the course of conversation, how, when he had been troubled by abdominal pains, his wife had taken one of his handkerchiefs to a healing medium named Jones, at the Marylebone Spiritualist Association. Later he had gone in person to see Jones, who is said to be controlled by the spirit of an Indian, appropriately named "Medicine Man." Medicine Man's advice proved so good that my friend was eventually cured.

I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this story, although it is probably perfectly true. I can, however, recount my own experience. I went to see Jones, who, when controlled, speaks in a rumbling bass voice. I went in the ordinary way, as a patient, and, so far as I know, nobody at that first meeting suspected my identity.

I took my turn in the chair opposite the medium, and I shall never forget the first words he spoke to me. "You are thinking of having an operation," he boomed, moving his hand towards his own appendix region. "You are badly advised, my son. I, Medicine Man, can cure you. . . ." This before I had opened my mouth. In some ways it was theatrically dramatic. The whole procedure seemed absurd, illogical. Nevertheless, I listened in silence. Medicine Man prescribed a diet, consisting for the most part of olive oil, grape juice, fruit in season, very little fish, and no meat. He also promised to be in spiritual attendance on me during the night. I went away wondering and somewhat dubious.

Nevertheless, I carried out the diet faithfully. After two days the pain I had been suffering had considerably eased; within a fortnight it had completely gone, and it has never returned. To all appearances I am completely cured.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MAGIC AND CRIME

**W**HILE, of course, being poles apart in their effect—the one undermining and the other aiming at the entertainment of Society—crime and magic have this in common—that both depend upon effective deception for their success, and crook and conjurer alike often rely on similar principles in the performance of their respective tricks.

There is not, however, a great deal of magic in some of the methods employed by card sharpers to defraud their victims. An expert professional card player relies to a great extent on his trained memory for his success. One glance at the cards is sufficient for him ; he will remember what cards are desirable, and will quickly shuffle those cards to the bottom of the pack. Full instructions for that method of false shuffling would occupy many pages, and even then they would be incomplete, a practical lesson being essential.

Having got the cards he wants to the bottom of the pack, the sharper has no difficulty in dealing them to his partner or to himself, and even if a spectator knows what is going on, or thinks he knows, he cannot distinguish between fair dealing and “bottom dealing,” as it is called.

Sometimes the sharper will get the required cards to the top of the pack, and put an indifferent card over them. Then he indulges in “dealing seconds,” as it is known—a difficult feat and not at all the kind of thing that a magician is ever called upon to do. A man who is expert at “dealing seconds” can deal the whole fifty-one cards and still have the original top card in his hand.

It is supposed that a sharper keeps a supply of aces and other desirable cards up his sleeve, but a much more



convenient place is in one of his socks. The cards are arranged in a special holder covered with black silk. The pocket is divided up into little compartments, so that any card required can be got at immediately. When the holder is in position the sock, of course, covers it. Sometimes the holder is inserted through a slit in the sock, and sometimes at the top. The player, sitting with his legs crossed, can reach down to it without the slightest trouble.

When the sharper finds it convenient to mark certain cards during a game, a tiny point of metal on his finger ring is the instrument he uses for this purpose. A card so marked can be distinguished immediately by the touch; the point raises a slight bump on the other side of the card.

Another useful dodge is a small mirror fastened in the bowl of a pipe; this enables the sharper to see the cards as they are being dealt. A little convex mirror is sometimes fixed under the table for the same purpose; the mirror is hinged, so that it can be folded back under the table.

Marked cards are seldom used nowadays; they are far too dangerous. Besides, at all clubs where high play is the fashion, it is customary to have cards with plain backs, and a pack is never used more than once.

In games where dice are used, the sharper has to proceed particularly warily, for the simple reason that the most innocent victim is usually aware of the fact that dice can be loaded. Still, there do exist loaded dice which are difficult to detect; unless the victim knows how to use them (in which case, of course, he would not be playing with them), he can throw them again and again without discovering that they are loaded. The expert then picks up the dice, throws them properly, and scores.

Each dice is hollow and has a little quicksilver in it, but the cavity is not perfectly even; there is a tiny "well" in the centre, and when the dice are thrown slowly, and at the right height from the table, the quicksilver sinks down into the "well" and the dice show the numbers they are meant to show. If the dice are tossed out quickly they may show any numbers, for the quicksilver does not get into action.

The sharpeners who get their living on race-courses, and in race trains are, as a rule, extremely clever manipulators,

and many of them would have made good sleight-of-hand conjurers. It must be remembered, however, that, whereas the professional magician must be prepared to do a lengthy programme of tricks, the sharpers perform the same two or three tricks over and over again under all kinds of conditions, and therefore become remarkably proficient.

The most common game of the race-course sharper is the well-known three-card trick, which, however, is not always introduced under that name.

Some little time ago I was travelling in a train which had come from the South of England, and two sailors, evidently just going on leave, were in my compartment. Apparently a gang of sharpers knew that there would be sailors on the train, for, when it stopped at a certain station, I heard one of the gang on the platform telling his friends : " This is it." They carefully examined three or four carriages before finally deciding on getting into mine. I at once signed to the two sailors to be on their guard, and they nodded in reply.

To anyone acquainted with the doings of sharpers this gang was a real gem. There was an elderly man, made up to resemble a well-to-do farmer ; there were two little men who looked as though they might be holiday-makers spending just one afternoon away from their small shops ; another man had a sober, staid appearance. Lastly, there was the expert three-card trick manipulator, a man dressed in a good blue serge suit ; he had a pleasant face, nice eyes, clean hands.

The elderly man tried to get me to talk to him. Finding that I was apparently absorbed in my paper, he turned to the two sailors, who did not respond.

The gang began to talk among themselves, and presently one of them asked the manipulator what he had been doing with himself that afternoon. He replied that he had been having a little game with four cards. He thought—he wasn't sure—that he had the cards on him ; if so, he would show them the game. He searched his pockets and discovered the four cards in an envelope. Spreading a newspaper on his knees, he began to throw the cards ; of course, the fourth was discarded.

Looking over the top of my paper, I was forced to admire the man's skill. It was a hot afternoon ; the man's hands must have been sticky ; the train was rocking badly ; the newspaper on the man's knees was not a firm table ; yet he never made the slightest slip during his little performance. I watched him carefully, and could not detect the smallest difference between what is known as a " straight throw " and a " trick throw."

The gang did a little betting with one another in the hope of getting the two sailors and me interested enough to join in, but on finding that there was " nothing doing," they got out directly the train stopped, and tried another carriage.

When the spectator has been induced to bet, the fun begins—for the sharper. When the cards are thrown skilfully, it is impossible for anyone to follow the movements of the cards or to distinguish between a " straight throw " and a " trick throw."

To add to the confusion of his victims, the sharper will at times openly alter the order of the cards after they have been thrown, and if the victim is apparently well off, and able to bet in a large sum, the trickster will tempt him still further with a little dodge known as " putting in the crimp."

The " crimp " is a turned-up corner of the queen. During the play, the poor dupe notices that one corner of the queen is slightly turned up, and that, apparently, the man with the cards is unaware of the fact. When the cards are thrown again, the victim, seeing one with the corner turned up, bets heavily that that card is the queen, and, of course, promptly loses his money.

While handling the cards the sharper bends up a corner with the third and little fingers of either hand, and, when necessary, he can turn a corner down in the same way.

The railway authorities often do their best to prevent people from being fleeced by this trick. I have frequently known guards and porters go up and down a race train informing everyone that sharpers were on the train, and yet in spite of that warning people would still persist in losing their money.

David Devant once told me of an amusing experience he had with some three-card sharpers in a train. Devant was interested in a book, and took no notice of the gang when they got into his carriage and tried to induce him to bet on "finding the lady." But the sharpers pestered him to persistently that at last the magician put his book down, picked up the cards, threw them dexterously, and said : " There, I always do it that way."

" Good heavens, gov'nor," exclaimed the leader of the gang, " why didn't you say you were one of us ? "

When the three-card trick man is earning his living on a race-course he usually has an open umbrella for a table, and a most unsatisfactory table it is when there is a high wind blowing ; but an expert will work successfully under any conditions. The open-air man always has one great advantage up his sleeve ; should a player, by a stroke of luck, " spot the lady " after he has staked money on his choice, the sharper's confederates raise a cry of " Police ! " and cards, umbrella and the gang vanish quickly.

The purse trick, which requires a great amount of skill, is another swindle usually performed on race-courses. The crook holds a small bag purse in his left hand, and three half-crowns in his right. He throws the half-crowns, one at a time, into the purse, counting one, two, three, as he does so.

Then he throws the purse from hand to hand—to convince everyone that it must contain the half-crowns—and finally offers to sell it for " half a dollar." When the purchaser opens the purse he finds that he has given half a crown for a cheap purse containing three pennies.

The sharper begins by having three pennies concealed in his right hand. Having put the half-crowns into the purse and taken them out again, he secretly lets the pennies drop into the purse—a very simple matter.

In apparently throwing the half-crowns into the purse, he works rapidly and really throws them behind the purse into the hand.

Sometimes a sharper will use a purse with two compartments in it ; the pennies go into one of the compartments, and the three half-crowns are openly thrown, one

at a time, into the other ; but as this compartment has a slit in it, the coins fall into the trickster's left hand. The crowd see that the right hand is empty, and conclude that the silver must be in the purse. To assure them on this point, the sharper will tap the purse on the toe of his boot ; the crowd hear the chink of silver—made, of course, by the coins in the hand—and are satisfied.

Then comes the hardest part of the trick. The sharper throws the purse from his left hand to his right and back again a few times. The audience see nothing but the purse, and so feel certain that the half-crowns are inside it ; but actually the half-crowns are under it, and they remain in that position while the purse is being tossed from hand to hand. If any reader thinks that part of this swindle is not difficult, let him try it !

“ Selling the pony ” is a nice little fraud with a touch of magic in it. The leader of the gang working this game has twelve small sticks. The first is numbered 1, 2, 3 ; the second 4, 5, 6, and so on ; anyone can examine them to see that they are all numbered properly. The sticks are sold at sixpence each. The leader announces that the winner will take five shillings and he (the speaker) will take a shilling for running the game. He then produces a bag with numbered counters in it and shows that they are fairly numbered from 1 to 36. Anyone may dip his hand into the bag and take out a counter and say what the number on the counter is ; the person holding a stick with the corresponding number on it takes the prize.

Everything is fair and square—to a certain extent—until the bag of counters is introduced. Three or four of the sticks go to the confederates of the leader, all members of the gang, and there is no trickery about the sticks. The bag has a division down the centre, separating it into two compartments, in one of which the counters are “ fair,” while in the other there are counters bearing from nine to twelve numbers repeated three or four times, and these are the numbers on the sticks held by the members of the gang. I have seen sharpers picking up money at the rate of ten shillings a minute at this swindle.

I once saw a roulette worked very cleverly at a

race-course. The hand was so made that as it revolved it brought a small magnetized needle through the face of the roulette. The hand would always stop at the place at which it was started, and the owner—an old woman—set it working herself.

Unfortunately for the sharpers, many people have heard that roulette wheels can be made to show an extraordinary run of luck for their owners, and so they are not so popular nowadays.

The methods employed by pickpockets, bag-snatchers, and men of that type are not particularly magical, but their work is certainly skilfully done. The easiest pocket to pick is that on the hip of the trousers, but, as a rule, thieves do not trouble to put their hands into a pocket of this kind. It is easier—and safer—to slit the front of the pocket open, and the contents then fall into the pickpocket's hands.

Many a man tells the pickpocket what pocket to pick ! One often sees in a crowd a man with his hand placed over the inside pocket of his coat ; any pickpocket in the crowd knows at once that the hand is not held in that position for nothing.

A lady's hand-bag is easily stolen. The average woman, intent on shopping and gazing into shop windows, thinks that so long as the handle of her hand-bag is in her hands all is well, but the pickpocket trades on his knowledge of the ways of women when they are shopping. With a neat little " cutter " he snips off the bag, leaving the handle in the owner's hands !

Two pickpockets working together can reap a good harvest in a railway train at times. One clever dodge is used for stealing tie-pins. The two pickpockets sit in two corners on the same side of a compartment with their victim between them ; when he is dozing a fine black thread held by the two crooks is passed up his body in front of him, caught under his tie-pin and—presto, the pin has vanished !

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE GREAT KELLAR

**A**MONG my earliest recollections of the great magicians of the world, the late Harry Kellar, of America, is outstanding. Thirty years ago American audiences were voting him the greatest magician ever to grace their stage, and his popularity was tremendous, even in those golden days of the magical boom. A few years later, when Houdini had established himself as a new and all-conquering force in magic, Kellar suffered some slight eclipse, but to the day of his retirement he was always capable of filling to capacity any theatre in which he played. Since he never performed in Great Britain, to the British people at large he is only a name, and perhaps a scarce remembered name at that ; but many of his finest and most bewildering illusions were inspired by private visits to this country.

As a magician, pure and simple, Kellar was immeasurably superior to Houdini. In the many years that Houdini was my friend, I never had occasion to form any great opinion of his magical powers. But where Houdini scored was in his amazing genius for showmanship. Kellar, too, was a great showman, but he was not a genius. He lacked the brutality, the aggressiveness, the egotism that typified the showman of showmen. Kellar succeeded because he was a magical artist ; Houdini excelled him because he forced the public of the world to acclaim him as a greater success. Theirs was essentially a psychological difference.

But although Kellar was a great magician and a showman of considerably more than average ability, he was seriously lacking in inventive gift. For this reason he was forced to search for and, where possible, buy from others, the illusions incorporated in his programmes. This was a

tremendous handicap to him, for it may be understood that magicians who were inventing tricks for their own use were not always prepared to part with them to a rival, no matter how tempting the inducement. A certain ruthless determination to get what he wanted helped Kellar to overcome the handicap, and, strange as it may seem, he departed from all the accepted rules of honesty and fair play when it came to choosing new tricks for his programme. If he saw an illusion which appealed to him he would get it; if not by fair means, then by foul; although I will do him justice by saying that he always first attempted to strike an honest bargain over such deals. If his preliminary overture failed, he would find out, either by bribery or close observation, how the trick was performed. Then, when a suitable period had elapsed, he would incorporate it in his own programme.

His search for new effects brought him once or twice every year to Great Britain. In London, it was his habit to visit any music-hall where a magician might be playing, but his chief aim was the Egyptian Hall, where Maskelyne and Cooke were establishing a considerable reputation. Kellar had a very high opinion of J. N. Maskelyne's illusions. He would mark down those which he thought suitable for his own use, and because, I suppose, of some illogical twist in his mental make-up, he would make Maskelyne an offer for the American performing rights. Of course, Maskelyne refused—as Kellar knew he would.

Nevertheless, Kellar usually returned with Maskelyne's secrets in his pocket. These he obtained by the simple expedient of bribing the assistants and mechanics employed at the Egyptian Hall. He would alter a few of the details, re-name the illusions entirely, and present them as his own to the audiences of America.

Nor was Maskelyne the only man to be thus victimised by the great Harry Kellar.

I can remember an occasion about thirty years ago, when Hercat was performing the famous *Blue Room Mystery* in London with considerable success. Kellar, who was visiting this country at the time, saw Hercat's show, and decided the trick would do splendidly for presentation in



the States. He approached Hecat with a view to buying the mystery, but although his offer was, I believe, considerable, the latter—a keen business man also—refused to listen to his proposals. But that didn't worry Harry in the least. Shortly afterwards Kellar staged *The Blue Room Mystery* in America with all the polish and effect of his rival's London show!

Dozens of other inventors suffered similarly at the hands of Kellar.

About the year 1904, Kellar decided to look for a successor. He was growing old then, and felt the time had come when he should choose a man to carry on his work when he himself went into a well-earned retirement. He had seen Paul Valadon perform at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, and immediately decided that here was the man whom he was seeking.

Valadon, naturally enough, jumped at Kellar's offer. The older magician promised to teach him his illusions, and introduce him to American audiences as "Harry Kellar's Successor." It was understood, of course, that any new illusions that were added to the programme were to be performed in the true Harry Kellar tradition.

The scheme was an utter failure. Valadon, although a very able conjurer, possessed a violent temper, and few people were able to bear his company for any length of time. Not long after the partnership had started, he demonstrated his petulance in no uncertain manner. The older man could not see eye to eye with him on many matters, and quarrels were frequent. Harry suddenly found he had backed a loser; he forthwith "sacked" Valadon, and restarted his search for a man to carry on his work.

This time he was more fortunate. After much deliberation he picked on Howard Thurston, and, so far as I know, never had reason to regret his choice. Thurston carried out his task well, and incidentally netted a useful fortune for himself.

## CHAPTER XV

**H**OWARD THURSTON'S is one of the most romantic stories in the history of magic.

In becoming Kellar's appointed successor in America, Thurston arranged to purchase Kellar's show upon the latter's retirement, agreeing, as I have said, that it should be worked in the proper Kellar tradition. In a profession where jealousy abounds, it was an unusual but highly successful agreement. Howard Thurston, now well over sixty, is a conjurer and illusionist of the very best class, and Kellar was indeed fortunate to choose one so gifted to carry on his work. Yet it must not be forgotten that at the time of Kellar's retirement, Thurston himself was comparatively unknown. The linking of his name with that of the Great Kellar bestowed on him a professional eminence which, in the ordinary way, only many years of painstaking work could have given him.

I first met Howard Thurston when he was appearing at the Palace Theatre, London. That was about 1904, when Richard Morton was manager, and a very bright young man named Alfred Butt was his assistant. Thurston's sleights were dazzling, but at that time illusions were more popular than mere conjuring.

He had not the money to compete with such men as De Kolta and Goldin, but was tremendously rich in go-ahead ideas. One of his slogans, I remember, was "The man who deceived Herman"—Herman, a famous American magician of the day, agreed that Thurston might use the slogan.

Yet reputations and incomes are not built on slogans alone, and Thurston understood that unless he could produce a competitive act of skilful illusions, he would get

nowhere. We talked the situation over in his dressing-room. He told me he had started life by selling potato peelers in American fair grounds, and in slow, and anything but easy, stages, had progressed to his present position. He was determined that nothing should stop his reaching the peak of the profession. Only he was very nearly "Broke."

I helped him to some extent by designing and making a few cheap illusions. There was nothing outstanding about them, but they were new and they were workable. At least, they gave him a start. He left England to tour the world, and, because he was a man of unusual courage and ability, he won through. Both in India and in Australia he encountered tremendous difficulties, yet he made money. He returned to America and made still more. Then he linked his name with Harry Kellar. That was probably the biggest moment of Howard Thurston's life.

To-day the one-time potato-peeler seller is a millionaire. Recently I have heard that Thurston, like Kellar before him, is searching for a successor. One wonders who the fortunate young man will be, and whether history will repeat itself. Magic is not the force now that it was thirty years ago—and yet I believe there is still a fortune awaiting the young magician who has ability, patience, and, above all, the courage to "hitch his wagon to a star."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE ZANCIGS AND THEIR BRILLIANT THOUGHT-READING CODE

**N**O man has ever had more cause to praise Dame Fortune than the late Julius Zancig. He was, indeed, a darling of the gods—and he was modest enough to admit it.

But apart from the tremendous luck which seemed an essential part of his life, Zancig was an able and courageous man. It took more than a fool to invent and memorise the complicated code which established Zancig, with his deformed wife, Agnes, as thought-readers unrivalled even by psychic mediums.

In view of the public interest aroused at the time of his death, I feel that a few words on his humble start in life and his meteoric rise to fame will not be out of place.

Julius Zancig was a Dane, but for some reason best known to himself, he preferred the world to believe he was a Swede. He was born of humble parents, and, for want of a better calling, his father decided to put him into the iron trade. When he had learnt all there was to be known about smelting, young Julius decided to emigrate to America, where he thought he might stand a better chance of earning a living.

Shortly after his arrival in the United States, Zancig was invited to a gathering of Danish emigrants. There he was startled to meet a deformed lady whom he had known many years previously in his native land. For a time they had been sweethearts, but as young Julius had grown into manhood the friendship had been dropped in the manner so common in such child affairs.

Agnes—the lady in question—was of a gentle and retiring

disposition. Her loneliness and extreme poverty touched Julius's heart for the second time in his brief life. After a short courtship, he proposed marriage and was accepted. It was one of the finest bargains he ever struck.

The Zancigs started their thought-reading act when requested to do a small show for a Church Brotherhood Society. Having no musical ability, they hit on thought-transference as being something novel and distinctive. Their first programmes were very simple, but the originality of their turn brought in a few requests for charity meetings and semi-professional concerts.

It was about this time that Julius met with a terrible accident which eventually proved the turning-point in his life. In the course of carrying on his trade as an iron smelter, his hand was badly burned by a mass of molten metal, and for many weeks he lay seriously ill. A sound constitution pulled him through, but on his recovery he decided to drop his position in the factory for the less dangerous but more precarious calling of a professional thought-reader.

They went to Coney Island, and it was here that Horace Goldin discovered them, doing thirty or forty shows a day. The magician saw possibilities in the act, and mentioned them to Hammerstein of New York. The latter attended a special demonstration, and a Press show arranged by Goldin proved a wonderful success. The Zancigs worked at Hammerstein's Winter Garden for several months, but eventually decided to undertake a tour in England.

Their first appearance was at the Alhambra, London. This performance was witnessed by Lord Northcliffe and W. T. Stead. Lord Northcliffe in particular was much impressed, and decided that the extraordinary couple from America possessed genuine psychic powers. Stead concurred in this view, and on the following day Northcliffe's newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, was filled with columns lauding the extraordinary powers of the Zancigs. It was a marvellous boost, and from that moment the pair were made.

"Psychic—that is the word which has made my fortune," Zancig once confided to me. "I had never heard it until Lord Northcliffe used it in connection with my work.

At first I did not understand it, and thought it had some connection with physic or medicine."

"Tell me why you became so famous," I asked.

"It is just my luck," he replied simply. "I owe it all to Lord Northcliffe."

What a confession ! But it was the simplicity and frankness of his nature which marked him as a man out of the ordinary. Even when he was earning huge salaries at the best theatres in America, he lived, as he had always done, in quiet and humble surroundings. He must have saved an enormous amount of money during his lifetime.

Zancig's turn was no better than a score of other thought-reading acts which were touring the States at the same time as himself. As he said, it was "just his luck." On one occasion I asked him if he was really psychic.

"I prefer to say nothing," he replied.

"Would you submit to a private test in my office ?" I asked.

"Certainly," he agreed.

That test was duly held. It was probably the only one at which the Zancigs completely failed. I wrote a number of common Hebrew words on slips of paper and handed them to Julius, asking his wife to spell them out. He took one glance at the words I had written, and then handed the slips back to me.

"We cannot do it," he said.

I thereupon persuaded him to tell me his secret, giving him my word of honour I would not betray it during his lifetime. With Zancig's death, the ban of silence is removed, and I have no qualms in putting down the story as Julius gave it to me.

The pair worked on a very complicated and intricate code. There was never any question of thought-transference in the act. By framing his question in a certain manner, Julius was able to convey to his wife exactly what sort of object or design had been handed to him.

Long and continual practice had brought their scheme as near perfection as is humanly possible. On several occasions confederates were placed in the audience, and at such times the effects seemed nothing short of miraculous.

All their various tests were cunningly faked, and their methods were so thorough that detection was an absolute impossibility to the laymen.

It often happened that Julius was handed some extremely unusual object which he found impossible to convey to his wife. He would simply pass on to another member of the audience, and so quick was his work that the omission was rarely noticed.

Early in 1924, when the Zancigs visited my London flat, Julius, deeply taken with the subject of Spiritualism, asked me for a written message. The first words the pencil wrote across the paper were: "Do not eat meat." This had reference to the internal sickness from which he eventually died. The message went on to say that he would not return to America so soon as he had planned.

"That is absurd," said Zancig. "I have already booked our berths and paid the passage money."

A few days later, however, he received a splendid offer from the authorities of the Wembley Exhibition to take a fortune-telling stand in the grounds of the Fun Fair. He signed the contract immediately, and set to training a number of attractive young girls in the fortune-telling business. Of course, it was sheer hocus-pocus. Curiously, he decided beforehand just how much money he wanted to make. Thus, each of his girls paid him a certain fixed amount each week. Anything they made above that amount was their own; and so great was the attraction of Zancig's name that some of the girls earned as much as £20 for a single week.

The fortunes of the Zancigs progressed by leaps and bounds until the death of Agnes caused the act to come to an untimely end. Julius, however, nothing if not persevering, decided to find another partner to carry on the work of his late wife. He found a lady called Ada, who consented to marry him and to co-operate in the thought-reading act.

This second partnership was never so successful as the first. Zancig's name was, of course, a huge draw at any time, but reports from America indicated that Ada lacked something of the ability and showmanship of Agnes.

The return visit of the Zancigs to this country started badly. A Press demonstration arranged by an astute publicity manager proved a fiasco, and they were labelled failures. Julius was despondent about his reception, and told me he intended to return to America forthwith.

"Let me arrange another Press show for you at the Magicians' Club," I urged. "We may save the situation yet."

Julius was agreeable, for he had nothing to lose and much to gain. Eight hundred guests were invited, including representatives of all the leading British newspapers.

Shortly before the performance was due to begin, the Zancigs were approached by a reporter from one of the London dailies.

"Zancig, I believe you are a fraud," said the enterprising young man. "But if your wife can tell me the word written on the card inside this sealed envelope, I will believe in you."

"Let me see the envelope," returned Julius, motioning his wife to the far side of the room. The reporter watched him closely, but failed to see him press the envelope against a sponge concealed beneath his armpit. That sponge was saturated with alcohol, a spirit which, as most people are aware, makes paper transparent. Julius had no difficulty in reading through the covering.

When Ada spoke the secret word, the reporter was astounded.

"It's marvellous!" he cried. And when the envelope was returned to him sealed and fastened as it had left him, he could only stand and stare in amazement at the performer.

The subsequent public show was a huge success, and the Zancigs found themselves on their old pedestal of popularity. There can be little doubt that the incident of the envelope and card did much to help them in their struggle for lost fame.

Towards the end of his life, Zancig's one object was to make money—a security, he told me, for the comfort of his old age. Lord Northcliffe's theory of his supernatural power had been exploded, but Julius did not worry.



Although he was still an active music-hall performer, he sold the secret of his system to a popular London weekly paper for £1,500. He wrote numerous books on thought-transference, and taught private pupils. This fever of Zancig's to turn his knowledge into money is understandable, for as a young man he had known all the horror and friendlessness of acute poverty.

When he died it seemed as though, for the first time, his incredible luck had forsaken him, for death came before he could reap the benefit of his lifetime of saving and of work.

It has been said that Julius Zancig was never happy with his second wife. This is absolutely untrue. Ada was a faithful and loving wife, and the following letter, which I received from her after his death confirms my opinion. I am printing the letter without the slightest alteration.

*September 17, 1929.*

BOX 36,  
OCEAN PARK,  
CALIF.

MY DEAR MR. GOLDSTON,

I am in receipt of your kind letter, and also of the newspaper sheets for which I thank you. I am making quite a collection, for I have also received some well written articles in this respect from several magazines and papers here in New York, New Jersey, and the Middle West. I am grateful that they have done Julius this honour, for it seemed to me that after laudibly performing his public work for so many years, those in the profession should honour him at his passing, in a public way.

There were some rather odd things said about me, almost intimating that I had no brainy capacity at all, being but a school teacher, but these in America are considered rather brainy, being put to such severe mental tests before entering the profession. I may add that I was not in the grades, but had a college training as a specialist in the teaching of young children, so I'd rather not be considered an idiot. Julius always said that I had taken a

very rapid and comprehensive understanding of his work, and did not hesitate to show me off at the highest class affairs here or elsewhere (not meaning theatrical work, but very elegant home or club affairs of the wealthy and refined).

I miss him more than I can say, and most truly appreciate every word that is said in his praise. These I am collecting for the closing chapters of our notable scrap book, and it is a sad closing to me.

He was a brave soldier to the very last breath, and as I kissed his brow in the last farewell, I felt truly that a brave and talented man had gone, and since his going several men have tried to get me to join them in the same line of work, but I have refused, for it would not be the same to me ever again.

I am running the business here alone for several weeks, giving private readings and selling occult books and other things pertaining to our work, and I am getting on very well, having had a very successful season, and I have several pupils at work learning the Mind Reading act, but at a distance, so they will not conflict with me. They clamour to share the title, but there can be only one Zancig in that field worth while.

I am still getting kind letters of condolence from many parts, and I welcome them all and feel very grateful, as I have said, in the honour they are paying him.

Many regret that he allowed the operations, and I was one, for we wanted to hold on to him, and although he was genial and often merry, the pain was more than he could bear, and I know he must be enjoying a glorious freedom from pain, and a fine rest with some congenial companions of the past. His wife, Agnes, must have been glad to welcome him to her side, after all the years of separation.

I am,

Most gratefully yours,

(Signed) ADA F. ZANCIG.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HOW ZOMAH DELAYED A MURDER

**T**HE greatest professional thought-readers the world has ever known are undoubtedly the Zomahs. Their almost incredible feats have startled audiences in England and the American continent for many years past, and many experts have confessed themselves completely baffled by their performances.

Early in the month of February, 1920, they were performing in one of the Canadian cities. After their evening show was finished, the stage door attendant presented a card to Mr. Zomah, and stated that a man was waiting who insisted on being granted an interview. But the words "Captain Henry Lloyd," which were written on the strip of pasteboard, conveyed nothing to the thought-reader.

The door attendant went on to explain that the gentleman seemed extremely agitated. More out of curiosity than anything else, Zomah consented to see the man.

Within a few seconds there was a tap on the door. In response to the performer's cheery "Come in," a tall, middle-aged man entered the room, and introduced himself as Captain Lloyd.

"I'm pleased to meet you," said Zomah. "What can I do for you?"

Captain Lloyd played nervously with the brim of his hat.

"Mr. Zomah," he said, "I am in very great trouble. I have not, however, come to borrow money. I wish to God it was only a question of finance that was worrying me. It is something far, far worse. I have been hypnotised. I am the plaything of another man's will. Can you help me?"

"Please explain," said Zomah, extremely puzzled.

Captain Lloyd explained. It appeared that, a short time previously, he had attended an amateur theatrical performance at which a prominent stockbroker whom I will call Kent had been present and had hypnotised Lloyd. From that moment the unfortunate Captain had never known a moment's happiness, for, so he said, he was completely dominated by Kent's personality.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Zomah, who wondered whether he was addressing a madman.

"I don't know exactly," replied Lloyd, "but something must be done. Why, only two days ago, I was on my way to the office. I had a heavy day's work in front of me, and was anxious to get ahead with it as soon as possible. But it was no good. I had to return home."

"Why?"

"Because Kent had willed it, Mr. Zomah. That man haunts me night and day." Lloyd lowered his voice dramatically. "If you cannot help me, I will shoot him like a dog. But, because I have seen your performance, and believe you to be possessed of some supernatural power, I have come to ask your advice!"

"I certainly can help you, Captain," said Zomah, thinking it best to humour his strange visitor. "At the moment, it is quite obvious that your will is too weak to cope with the power that this man has put over you. With my help, however, you will be able to more than hold your own, because I can will you to strengthen your own determination. From henceforward, you must forget that such a man as Kent ever existed."

Captain Lloyd was profuse in his thanks, and took his departure in a much happier state of mind. A few days later he informed the thought-reader that he had quite thrown off the uncanny influence that had been placed over him. As a result, he was healthier both in mind and body.

That, so far as the Zomahs are concerned, is the end of the story. But twelve months later there was a sudden and dramatic sequel which might well have been taken from a Lyceum melodrama. Captain Lloyd murdered Kent by shooting him through the heart.

It can only be assumed that for a short time Lloyd had

been persuaded he was free from Kent's influence. But, after a few months, the Captain had again felt himself to be under the hypnotic curse, and determined to carry out his threat of murder.

Accompanied by a friend—who seemed to be in entire ignorance of Lloyd's intentions—he called at Kent's office, but was refused admission. He had lunch, and called again. This time he made no mistake. Kent was shot through the heart while sitting at ease in his office chair.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DAVID DEVANT—MASTER MAGICIAN

**M**AGIC persists though its masters depart. Houdini came—and went. Maskelyne, de Kolta, Kellar, Lafayette, Chung Ling Soo—all have played their hour of life upon its stage, added to it their individual stores of knowledge, and passed on. But they have left gaps ; and no gap is so great as that which once was filled by David Devant.

Devant, of course, is not dead, but magic knows him no longer. To many of the younger generation he is but a name, inevitably linked with Maskelyne, the Egyptian Hall, and St. George's Hall. David Devant. Only a name . . . there is something unusually sad in that thought.

Devant's contribution to English magic has been incalculable. His complete mastery of his subject, his gentle yet dominant grip on the imagination of his audiences, served to raise magic to a high place in the entertainment world. True, there were others before Devant who had brought magic into favour—notably, Houdini and Lafayette. Yet neither of those two superb showmen had the same suave, aristocratic touch as Devant. They seemed, in comparison, a trifle vulgar. Devant, in all his long association with magic, had no use for bombastic publicity methods such as Houdini used.

I first saw David Devant perform at the old Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, some forty years ago (1893 or thereabouts). He was then just making a name for himself as a stage performer ; before that he had been a private entertainer. I thought his show one of the cleverest I had witnessed, and felt I would like to see him perform again.

A few years later, when he had become the provincial partner of Maskelyne and Cooke, he gave an entertainment

at the Hope Hall, Liverpool. He was performing an escape illusion playlet known as *Will, the Witch and the Watchman*, and with the recollections of his impressive London performance still in my mind, I decided to attend the show.

When the escape box was brought to the front of the stage, Devant asked if a gentleman from the audience would be good enough to assist him. There was no response. Thinking to prevent a brother magician the embarrassment of asking for help that was not forthcoming, I rose from my seat in the stalls, and stepped up to the platform.

Devant recognised me, and immediately became suspicious. I assumed he thought that I had volunteered my help in order to probe into the secret of his trick. Nothing was further from my mind. At any rate, David decided to take no chances, and asked for another volunteer. After some difficulty, he persuaded a man who had been sitting near me to go up on to the stage. To get rid of me, he employed an old trick known in the profession as "the conjurer's force."

"These two gentlemen have kindly consented to help me," he told the audience. "Which shall I choose, the gentleman on the right or on the left?" Whichever one of us the audience chose, I was bound to be asked to leave the stage, as Devant had not said whether he meant the audience's right and left or his own. So I resumed my seat, feeling uncomfortably small.

I was not greatly impressed with the box escape, and after the show I waited for him in order to show him a model steel cage escape of my own, which I thought a good deal more mysterious than *Will, the Witch and the Watchman*. However, he told me that this was the invention of J. N. Maskelyne, and this being so, he could not substitute another trick. I was surprised at this, for I had been given to understand that he bought apparatus from a well-known magical inventor called Frank Hiam. I was disappointed, too, for nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to have seen my trick in the hands of so polished a conjurer as Devant.

I decided to build the illusion myself. A few weeks afterwards, I showed it to T. Nelson Downs, the American







coin manipulator, who found me a customer willing to pay more than twice the amount I would have accepted from Devant. Later, when the secret leaked out, the trick was used by several big illusionists in Europe and America. Some years afterwards one foreign magician accused me of being a fraud, calmly stating that he had invented the trick himself. Needless to say, this claim was never substantiated.

Although I was anxious to claim Devant as a friend, I refrained from again approaching him, owing to the fact that I had been very coldly treated by his partner, John Nevil Maskelyne. That, of course, is another story, but rather than run the risk of further friction, I thought it advisable to avoid meeting any of the business associates of the Grand Old Man of St. George's Hall.

I was, therefore, agreeably surprised when Devant called on me one morning, and cordially invited me to visit him at his flat. His manner was most friendly, and he added that he was anxious to purchase some new tricks.

"You supply our leading magicians with apparatus," he said, "but you have never advised me when you have got anything good."

I refrained from mentioning the steel cage incident, and assured him that the fault would be rectified in the future.

My visit to Devant was one of the most enlightening experiences of my life. Among magicians his quiet and reserved nature was mistaken for unsociability. I found him an excellent conversationalist, willing to speak on any subject which interested me. At the time it struck me that he was a man who would never stoop to a mean or underhand action, and in the course of many years' business with him, I never had occasion to revise that opinion.

Before I left that evening, Devant had given me an order for several new tricks. But I came away with something far more valuable than a mere commercial contract. I had his friendship.

In the profession Devant was a much misunderstood man. A certain nervous diffidence made him difficult of approach—so difficult, in fact, that he came to regard

himself as extremely unpopular among his magical colleagues. In this he was mistaken, as I, to some extent, was able to demonstrate when I organised a tribute to him from all the magicians of the world. Yet it would be a mistake to suggest that Devant was universally liked. The general attitude of the magical profession towards him was that of a number of mice watching a sleeping dog.

Houdini, of course, was not a mouse. He was a lion, snapping his jaws at all and sundry. He snapped them at Maskelyne, Devant, and myself, so jealous was he of his professional standing. I was his friend, and had retired from the stage ; consequently, he let me off lightly. But to anyone who endangered his name, to anyone who seemed likely to filch a share of his limelight, Houdini was a tyrant.

On one occasion he was in my office when I was making up the pages for a number of *The Magicians' Annual*. Press day was near, and I found myself sadly lacking in material. Houdini listened sympathetically to my troubles, but offered no suggestions. Somehow or other our conversation turned to a new programme which Devant was presenting at St. George's Hall. In it there were four extremely original illusions : a hand in a glass case which picked up a chosen card ; a mysterious kettle which poured out any drink selected by the audience ; goldfish swimming in a bowl, and spelling out a chosen word ; and some glasses of stout which disappeared and reappeared on a tray held in Devant's hand.

Houdini was greatly interested in my descriptions of these effects, but made no comment on them. Our thoughts turned to other subjects. As he turned to leave me, Houdini smiled and said reflectively : " You know, Will, every lock can be opened." I have never been certain that I understood his meaning.

The next morning I received an anonymous package through the post. Inside were four beautifully drawn diagrams, and I saw at once they were the plans of Devant's illusions. My editorial mind jumped at the opportunity of a " scoop." I rushed the plans over to the printer, and within a week there appeared one of the most successful issues of *The Magicians' Annual* ever published.

Devant was furious at the disclosure. One could hardly blame him. He sacked all his assistants on the spot, but, yielding to their protestations of innocence, reinstated them the following day. A little later, when our friendly relations were resumed, he asked me how I had come by my information, and in particular, how I had obtained the exact design of his wife's buttonhook, which had an important part in the working of the "Spelling Fish" illusion.

It was beyond me to give Devant an answer. The plans had been sent to me, why, and by whom? Houdini protested that he had nothing to do with the business. And yet? . . . When Houdini died, I felt the riddle would for ever remain unanswered.

Shortly after I had won Devant's friendship, I went to see him perform at the Finsbury Park Empire. As I was sitting in his dressing-room after the show, an idea struck me.

"David," I said, "the time has come when the magicians of the world should acknowledge you as their master."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"They should make you a public presentation. Before I take the matter up, I should like your consent."

He pondered for a minute or two in silence.

"It's a kind thought," he said. "But I'm afraid you would find it a difficult task. I'm too reserved for the liking of most people. You could not get many to subscribe to my presentation." It was a considerable time before I could persuade him to agree to my suggestion.

The presentation was made at St. George's Hall, before a packed house. Magicians from all parts of the world attended, and cheered him to the echo. They came to pay homage to a Master Magician.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A KING OF MODERN CONJURERS

**K**ING of modern conjurers is the title which might well be bestowed on Horace Goldin. He is without an equal in the entire realm of magic.

All Goldin's illusions are sensational and strikingly original, and most characteristic of him is his flair for news, for attracting attention. This, even from his earliest days, assured him success. Lord Northcliffe once said, "If a man bites a dog—that's news." Figuratively speaking, Goldin is constantly "biting dogs."

I recall one particularly illuminating instance of this faculty of Goldin's for seizing upon a topical situation to provide him with a fresh illusion, and at the same time put him "in the news."

Quite recently a group of English scientific investigators created a minor sensation by departing for the Hartz Mountains for a ceremony in Black Magic, accompanied by a goat, a virgin maiden, and Harry Price (as a sort of arch-demon!). Their idea, they declared, was to prove conclusively that Black Magic was nonsense. When the moon was at the full, and with a shining example of female virtue to assist them, they attempted to turn a harmless billygoat into "a youth of surpassing beauty." Needless to say, the experiment was abortive.

A few days afterwards, however, a young lady made an offer for the goat concerned. A deal was effected—and the purchaser returned with the goat to her employer—none other than Horace Goldin. Goldin's inventive genius had been to work, and he had evolved an illusion which was a burlesque of the Hartz Mountains ceremony. With the aid of the actual goat, a maiden "of pure heart," a full moon obligingly supplied from the wings, Horace himself

as the arch-demon—and lo ! the goat really *does* turn into a strikingly handsome young man !

Magic once rescued Goldin from a night in the cells, and he relates with amusement how by his resourcefulness he outwitted the New York police.

Some years ago he was performing at Hammerstein's Roof Garden, in New York. Whether his business had been particularly good or not I cannot say, but in order to enable him to travel about the city and keep his numerous engagements to time, he decided to purchase a new car. I know of no finer judge of an automobile than Goldin, and on this occasion he invested in an extremely expensive and speedy car, complete with negro chauffeur.

One night after his show, Horace was asked to attend the farewell dinner to the Great Kellar. Although he must have felt extremely tired, he was never a man to hurt another's feelings if it could be avoided. He accepted the invitation, and it was well after three o'clock in the morning before he was able to get away.

Although the speed limit in this particular part of New York was fifteen miles an hour, there was a good clear stretch of road ahead, and, obeying his master's injunction to "step on it," the chauffeur soon had the speedometer needle pointing at thirty-five miles an hour. But they had not gone very far before they were sighted and overtaken by one of the many "speed cops" that abound in the city.

To say that Horace was annoyed would be putting it mildly. But he had been caught fairly and squarely, and knew he would have to see the matter through. He waited in moody silence as the policeman produced his note-book and pencil.

"Wasyername ?" asked the upholder of the law.

"Goldin—Horace Goldin."

"What ! Not the conjurer ?"

"Yes."

The policeman lowered his pencil.

"Say, Mr. Goldin," he said, "I'm real sorry about this. I wouldn't pinch you for a barrel of bucks. What'll I do now ?"

"You can let me go," suggested Goldin, nothing if not practical.

"That's just it. I can't do that. You see Mr. Goldin, the inspector's seen me approach you, and I guess I'll have to make a charge. You were doing a good thirty-five, you know. Tell you what," he added, as an afterthought, "I'll say you were doing twenty-three. They'll let you off light for that. But you'll have to come to the station."

Seeing that any argument would be useless, the magician returned to his car, and gave the chauffeur instructions to follow the policeman to the station. Arrived at their destination, Horace was taken before the station inspector, and the charge was made out.

The inspector listened in silence while the policeman made his statement. Then he turned to Goldin.

"Bail of hundred dollars until to-morrow morning will cover it," he said.

Now Horace had only ninety-eight dollars in his pocket. He offered to leave this, together with a valuable diamond ring which would more than make up the full amount of his bail.

The inspector waved his offer aside with a contemptuous gesture.

"That's no good," he said. "I can't accept bail from you. It must be somebody else."

Horace bit his lip in perplexity. Here was a pretty kettle of fish. If the money were not paid, it would mean that he would have to spend the night in an uncomfortable police cell. Suddenly a brilliant thought struck him.

"What if my chauffeur paid it?" he asked.

"That'll do me," replied the inspector.

The magician turned to his coloured chauffeur, who had followed him into the station.

"Now then, Rastus," he said. "The inspector wants a hundred dollars. You must pay it for me."

The negro's eyes opened wide.

"Fo' Heaven's sake, boss!" he ejaculated. "I ain't got no hundred dollars. I ain't got nothin'!"

The chauffeur was speaking the truth, and Goldin knew it. But the magician had quickly devised a scheme whereby he could be released from custody. Secretly palming the wad of dollar notes in his own pocket, he turned towards the negro.



HORACE GOLDIN





"Come, Rastus," he said. "I know very well you've got a big pile of notes in your pocket. Pay my bail, there's a good fellow, and let us get home." As he spoke, he pulled the other towards him by the lapel of his coat, and quietly inserted the pile of notes into the chauffeur's pocket. "Now then," he went on, as the negro stared stupidly at him. "Get ahead with it. Just a hundred dollars."

"But boss," said the bewildered Rastus, "yo' sure is mad. I tells you I ain't got one buck, let 'lone a hundred dollars. Yes, yo' sure is crazy, boss. I ain't got nothin'."

"I'm certain you have, Rastus. Just feel in your pockets and find out, there's a good chap."

"It ain't no good, boss," exclaimed the negro, inserting his hand into his coat pocket. "I tells yo'——" He stopped short as his fist closed round the wad of notes that Horace had placed there a few moments previously. "Well I'm . . ."

"I knew you had," said Goldin, pleased at the success of his scheme. "Just give it to the inspector, and we can be on our way home."

But Rastus was not to be so easily deprived of his unexpected find.

"Sure, I guess I wants all this, boss," he said grinning. "I wants every buck of it. I saved it all, and I wants it for somethin ver' special, boss."

This was a development for which Horace was quite unprepared. However, by dint of much talking, and a promise to repay the money in the morning, he persuaded the chauffeur to hand the notes over to the inspector. The latter took them without a word of thanks, and counted them in silence.

"Ninety-eight dollars," he said. "I shall want two more before you can go."

Again Goldin's magical art came to the rescue. "Let me count them," he said. He ran through the pile quickly, and managed to extract a two-dollar bill unseen. "Quite right," he agreed. "There's only ninety-eight. Give the gentleman two more dollars, Rastus."

Rastus grinned.

"Yo's taken all I got, boss. Yo's taken all my savings for somethin' ver' special."

"Rubbish. Feel in your pocket again."

The chauffeur did as he was bidden, and wonderingly produced the two-dollar note.

"Say, boss," he said, "I sure didn' know I had dat. I guess I must——"

"That's all right. Pay it to the inspector, and we can get home."

The money was paid over, and Goldin was handed a receipt for a hundred dollars, although, of course, he had parted with only ninety-eight. Receiving final instructions to attend at the court early next morning, he returned to his car, and proceeded on his way at a leisurely fifteen miles an hour.

But the comedy was not yet ended. On the next day Goldin appeared in court, and briefed a very capable attorney for his defence. At length the case was called, and the policeman appeared in the witness box to make his sworn statement.

"Tell me," said the counsel. "How fast was Mr. Goldin travelling?"

"Twenty-three miles an hour, sir."

"I see. I suppose you overtook him rapidly on your motor bicycle, didn't you?"

"Oh yes, sir," said the policeman, pleased at this compliment on his professional ability.

"How did you know that Mr. Goldin was travelling at twenty-three miles an hour?"

"By my speedometer. That was the speed it registered."

"Good. But, if you were travelling faster than the car, then Mr. Goldin must have been doing a good deal less than twenty-three miles an hour. That's common sense."

The magistrate agreed, and Goldin was handed back one hundred dollars, with costs against the prosecution. He always says that no money has given him as much satisfaction as those two dollars he made out of the New York police force!

## CHAPTER XX

### A MEDLEY OF MAGICIANS

#### CHEVALIER ERNST THORN

**G**ERMANY has produced no finer illusionist than the late Chevalier Ernst Thorn. A dignified man, he possessed a magnificent stage presence, and a most expert knowledge of magical mechanics. He was, indeed, a supreme artist, and his reputation on the Continent was unsurpassed by even the best of British and American magicians.

Yet it is as a man rather than as a magician that I remember Thorn. Of the many great magicians of the past thirty years I knew none more given to unprofessional eccentricities than this great German illusionist, and I have never doubted that if Thorn had turned his characteristic peculiarities towards publicity, as Houdini and Lafayette did, he would have been accounted one of the best half-dozen magicians the world has known.

The Chevalier was a man at once easy to love, yet difficult to befriend. He aroused in one a feeling that was a mixture of admiration, pathos, and awe.

Thorn loved his wife with a love which seemed to shatter much of his true perspective of life. He seemed incapable of fitting her into his world of everyday things. She was a tall woman, dark, and strikingly beautiful. Often she helped him in his stage work, but trite as it may sound, I believe Thorn desired this, not because her assistance was of value to him, but because her very nearness intoxicated him. Certain it was that he could not bear her to be from his sight for any length of time.

I remember on one occasion calling at the stage door of the Alhambra Theatre, for a chat with Thorn. I found him and his wife talking in one of the corridors running behind

the stage. Thorn gave no greeting as he saw me, but, taking his wife by the arm, ran her a few yards down the passage, bundled her through the door of his dressing-room, and turned the key on her. Such was the jealousy of this extraordinary man.

In all probability it was the grief which he suffered at his wife's death that eventually turned Thorn's mind. He wrote me a large number of letters ; they were incoherent and scarcely legible, but the most heartrending letters I have ever read. He saw great hope in Spiritualism, and for weeks he sat by his wife's grave, hoping for some sign, some message from her, but no sign was given him.

In the financial crash which shook Germany in 1922, Thorn lost his entire fortune. It seems probable that he had foreseen the disaster—at any rate, as a precaution against poverty, he sewed a large amount of his wife's jewellery (including a valuable diamond necklet) in the interior of a cushion. But the crowning tragedy of his life was that his mind and memory left him too soon. The mark fell to millions to the pound. Thorn was beggared. And in the poverty and distress which he endured, he could not remember the jewellery secured inside his cushion. It was found there after his death—stones to the value of many thousands of pounds, which would have ensured him a definite comfort in his declining years.

### CHEFALO

For sheer magical artistry, I know of no modern magician who can bear comparison with Chefalo, the Italian. Chefalo is an illusionist, but it is not so much his effects as the enchanting delicacy with which he presents them that I have always admired. They have all the charm of a drawing-room entertainment on a very large scale.

Of recent years, Chefalo has established himself as a magician of international importance, but, like most who have scaled the magical ladder, he started in a very humble way. Early in the present century he toured America with a small act of original prettiness, incorporating the production of ribbons, flowers, and so on. He was a moderate

success—that is to say, he made just sufficient money to live on. He came to England, where he was liked, but soon forgotten.

But if Chefalo had no money, he had great ambitions. He was astute enough to understand that the way of success in magic was through big illusions. He came into my office one morning and revealed his plans for a tour of the world. He wanted some new effects, and commissioned me to make them for him. He was prepared to spend all his available capital with me. I have the original invoice by me as I write : it is to the amount of £10.

Since those early days Chefalo has toured the world many times, and has some amazing experiences to recount. One of his most interesting stories concerns an incident in Tokio in 1929. So great was the interest aroused through his bills that the streets around the theatre were crowded for hours before his first performance was due to begin. Extra police were summoned to deal with the situation, but so congested did the thoroughfares become, that eventually it was decided to open the doors of the theatre. The manager telephoned through to Chefalo's hotel, and suggested the performance should start at once.

In view of the unusual situation, Chefalo agreed, although two hours had yet to go before the advertised time of his show. Now, although an excellent linguist, Chefalo's knowledge of Japanese is extremely limited, and he had to enlist the services of an interpreter. The latter, a Japanese provided through the management, spoke excellent English and Italian, and seemed altogether an obliging little fellow.

He took his stand on the stage at Chefalo's side, and explained to the audience the various points which Chefalo wished to emphasise. This is a difficult way of working, but where the problem of language occurs it provides the only solution. In view of the previous enthusiasm of his audience, Chefalo had naturally expected some vigorous applause. Instead, each of his illusions was received with shrieks of laughter. He was perplexed and embarrassed ; yet through four long hours he carried on with his programme. It was, he says, the unhappiest performance he has ever given.

Immediately he had returned to his dressing-room, a high official from the American Embassy called upon him. This gentleman, who had seen the performance, explained the situation. The interpreter, it seemed, had given full play to a mischievous sense of humour. In addition to explaining to the audience the necessary points indicated by Chefalo, he had given an accurate description of how the illusions were worked. The opening of trap doors, the secret movements of assistants, cabinet fakes, and so on—all of which were observable from his position on the stage—were detailed as essential points in the entertainment.

Shortly after this experience, Chefalo toured for a short time in Soviet Russia. At his first performance he was warned by a police agent that he would have to reveal the secret of every illusion that he performed. This he naturally refused to do. He compromised, however, by agreeing that his interpreter should explain beforehand that the illusions were all trickery, and not inspired in any way by supernatural agency. Such are the sad conditions governing the modern Russian audience.

#### JOHN MULHOLLAND

I cannot close this chapter without some reference to John Mulholland, the young American who promises to become one of the greatest magical forces of this century.

Mulholland is the exponent of what he would term "a new angle" on magic; and, to me, it is significant that two of the greatest magical men in history—de Kolta and Houdini—achieved their success through specialisation on a new idea. De Kolta marked the age of big illusions, and in his lifetime Houdini made escapes the most arresting branch of magic. Mulholland is neither an illusionist nor an escapologist. He is a magical psychologist.

His artistry in sleights is wonderful. But what concerns him much more is the psychological reaction of his audiences to himself. Indeed, it would be more correct to describe him as a magical scientist than a magical artist. He has evolved, too, a new form of magical entertainment,

a demonstration of magic accompanied by a scientific lecture.

These have earned him a very considerable reputation in the United States, and it may well be that he is the pioneer of a fashion which will re-establish magic as the entertainment force it was in the early years of the century.



## CHAPTER XXI

### MY MAGICAL LIFE

**M**Y own first introduction to magic was in the form of a conjurer's outfit, which was presented to me, if I recollect rightly, on my eleventh or twelfth birthday. In the way of most such outfits, it created little more than a passing interest for me. My tricks had a habit of going wrong, or, what was worse, failing completely before my audiences, the usual family circle.

Life, too, offered strong counter-attractions in the form of tops, tin soldiers, books of piracy, smuggling, and buried treasure. It was inevitable that within a few weeks my magical outfit should find its way, with its contents in sad need of repair, to the corner of some dusty attic.

Time passed; I was elevated from knickerbockers to long trousers; I still had no thought or inclination for magic.

And then, one bright spring morning, when I was fifteen, I turned for a hair-cut into a hairdressing shop near my home in Liverpool. The benches were filled with prospective customers waiting for their turn for shave or hair-cut, and I found myself a seat behind the barber's chair, and tried to interest myself in a dilapidated paper which specialised in racing tips. My attention soon wandered, and my gaze fastened on the large mirror set before the barber's chair.

The man in the chair had his back towards me, but his face was reflected in the mirror. It is strange to think on what small things the careers of most of us hang. Had I found an interesting book, I should probably never have looked up, never have seen the extraordinary face which was looking back at me from the glass—and never have entered the magical profession.

It was a thin, gaunt, bearded face, with eyes heavily lidded and hollows beneath them. I was at once reminded of the famous mystery picture of Christ by Gabriel Max, the Austrian (it was then on exhibition in Liverpool), in which the eyes appear slowly to open and then close. I gazed fascinated, and for the life of me I could not tell whether the man's eyes were open or shut.

They must have been open, for when the barber had finished with him, he turned round to me and gave me a friendly smile. I realised then that he had been watching me, and in awkward schoolboy fashion I apologised for my rudeness.

The man told me that he was a conjurer, and to prove his words, disappeared a penny and produced it from behind my ear. The whole thing was so slickly done that I could only stare dumbfounded.

He laughed at my astonishment, and when I recovered my breath, I asked him to tell me about himself. His name, he said, was Professor Alexander, and he performed at a penny show-hall in Lime Street. The work was very tiring; he started at ten in the morning and gave a show every hour until nightfall. For this he was paid thirty shillings a week—a beggarly sum even in those days.

Later that same day I went to see my new-found friend at work. If the truth were known, he was probably a very poor magician, but his was the first professional magical performance I had witnessed, and his tricks left me amazed. To a schoolboy who had only toyed with string and eggs, and handkerchiefs of artificial silk, they were miracles.

I met Professor Alexander fairly often after that, and it was not long before I realised how some of his tricks were performed. I remember he actually gave me a few secrets in return for my friendship, before he left Liverpool to tour some schools.

I began seriously to study the subject of magic, and worked and practised hard until I knew many tricks by heart, but one incident connected with my reading almost decided me to throw up magic for good.

Coming across the name of a magical salesman in London—one Professor Bland, who had a shop in Oxford

Street—I persuaded my father to take me with him on one of his numerous visits to town ; I also persuaded him to provide me with ten shillings to purchase some tricks. When I arrived in London, I left my father to his business conference and hurried along to Oxford Street as though my life depended on the mission.

There was a dusty entrance leading up to the shop, and I banged with my fist on the counter for quite two minutes before Professor Bland appeared. He was short and unkempt, with his sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

“ Well ? ” he asked.

I told him I wanted some tricks.

“ Put your money on the counter,” said he, and like a fool I did. He picked it up and slipped it in his pocket.

Then he showed me a trick. He extended his fingers ; they were quite empty. He rolled up his sleeves a little higher to show me that there was nothing concealed in them. Finally he brought his hands together and produced a small silk handkerchief from them. It was, I thought, a better trick than any Professor Alexander had shown me.

Professor Bland then explained the mystery to me. The handkerchief was screwed up into a small ball and placed in the cuff of the sleeve. When the sleeve was rolled up, apparently for the purpose of fair play, the handkerchief was secured between the fingers, and produced in dramatic fashion when the palms were brought together.

The whole thing seemed a terrific swindle, especially since Bland refused to sell me another trick for my ten shillings. The handkerchief was worth, at the most, only ninepence. I begged, pleaded, and cajoled ; I pointed out how angry my father would be if he knew I had received only a small silk square for my money. But Professor Bland, having got his fingers on my ten shillings, refused to see my point of view, and eventually I made a sorry and tearful way out.

Still, it was really a very small incident, and although my disappointment rankled for some time afterwards—I don't think it has disappeared even now—it was insufficient to quell my rapidly growing enthusiasm. From this time onwards the magical bug had me fast in its grip.

I obtained the addresses of a number of magical dealers, and many were the tricks that I purchased through the post. Most of them were good value, and my faith in the integrity of conjurers was gradually restored. I practised until my fingers ached, and read until my eyes were tired with print. At the end of some months, I was a moderately efficient conjurer, with a good amateur ability at sleights and patter.

I was seventeen when I gave my first public performance. It was at a local charity bazaar, and I appeared at the "special request" of the promoter. I don't think I was an outstanding success, but I succeeded to the point that I did not make a fool of myself. When the end came, I felt I had gained enormously in experience—which, indeed, I had. I decided to appear as often as I could; charity bazaar followed charity bazaar, concert followed concert, and I suppose it was this constant practice which gave me an air and polish not usually seen in an amateur performer. I felt that I had made considerable progress since the time Professor Bland had foisted his silk handkerchief on me, but I had never seriously considered the question of becoming a professional magician.

It was at one of the many charity performances which I attended that I was approached by a representative of Summers and Warner, then a famous London firm of theatrical agents, of whom, incidentally, I had never heard. The man, a flashy-looking autocrat with a black hat and an overcoat down to his ankles, asked me if I had many "dates." I had not the remotest idea what he meant by this expression, but felt I should be on the safe side if I answered no.

He told me that he could give me a week's booking for a gala shortly to be held at Aintree. The fee, he said, would be thirty-five shillings a week. My mind reeled at the mention of this sum; it was more than Professor Alexander had earned when first I met him! I straightway agreed to the suggestion, and I fancy my eagerness must have warned the man that he was dealing, not with a professional as he had first imagined, but with an amateur chiefly commendable for his enthusiasm.

My agreement signed, I rushed off to my father's tailors to fit myself with a "professional" habit. I wanted the world to know me no longer as a man who worked for love of magic, but as one who earned a living at it.

The tailor was a man with imagination. He dressed me in an enormously long fawn overcoat with buttons the size of small saucers. From somewhere or other I procured a fawn bowler hat to match, and it was in this garb that I met my father and broke to him the news of my first professional engagement. I think my pantomime appearance must have forewarned him; at any rate, he took the shock easily enough, and ended by giving me his blessing.

Throughout the whole of my career, I have been conscious of my luck in having a father who never permitted the hidebound prejudices of his age to hinder his natural desire for my success.

My first appearance as a professional performer was not conspicuous for its success. I was suitably shocked when the proprietor of the Aintree gala informed me that I had to perform in a small tent, for I realised then that I was, in effect, nothing better than a "side-show" entertainer—and to one whose services as a charity performer had been frequently sought, the thought was more than a little galling. My indignation was further increased when I learned that in order to attract a crowd I was expected to stand outside my tent and perform a few of my tricks, the idea being that when sufficient people had collected, I was to invite them inside at a charge of sixpence per head, and proceed with my entertainment proper.

From the start I foresaw trouble. My complete working repertoire consisted of only six tricks, and by the time I had performed them all for the first time outside the tent, I had attracted only three grubby-faced little boys. On the second occasion, there were about a dozen people, some seven or eight of whom paid for admission. The unflattering remarks that were passed to me when I repeated exactly the same performance inside the tent, taught me a never-to-be-forgotten lesson. That night I practised and rehearsed as I had never done before, and by the end of the week, I managed to double my repertoire. My reward was

not slow in coming. On the last day of my appearance at Aintree, a theatre proprietor offered me £6 for a single week's engagement at Southport.

The experience I had learned in my first week as a professional magician helped to make my Southport engagement a success, and whilst I was appearing at the theatre, I was also asked to give my services in the afternoon to a circus which was appearing in the town during the same week. After making satisfactory arrangements with the theatre manager, I eagerly accepted the offer.

I was twenty when I wrote my first book, *The Secrets of Magic*, which, for all its faults, served an excellent purpose as a pioneer book, and was, too, a financial success.

Some three years later I published a second book, entitled *Latest Conjuring*. Like the first, it proved a success, but although I disposed of my first edition of 22,025 copies in a single season, I decided that no second edition should be struck. There is an interesting history attached to that decision.

In my book I had explained how certain American showmen effected escapes from police cells by bribing the police warders in charge. Houdini, at that time building up a reputation in America, became so incensed at my disclosures (although he knew them to be true) that he indiscreetly referred to me as a "busker."

I was as jealous of my growing name as Houdini was of his, and I began an action for libel against him. He wrote to me and asked me to suppress the action, since it would profit neither of us and might conceivably do a great deal of harm to the magical profession as a whole. I replied that if he would withdraw his remark about me, I would take no further action. He agreed, and to show my good will in the matter, I promised him that after the first edition of my book had been sold, no further copies would be printed.

Shortly after the publication of *Latest Conjuring*, I decided to devote my time to serious magical writing, and the creation and building of illusions, for good.

I have never been in sympathy with those magicians and magical inventors who prefer their best secrets to die with

them rather than pass them on to their fellow magicians. How is magic, as an art, to progress when all that is best and finest in it is kept from its followers ? I am an ardent Spiritualist, but my psychic investigations have yet to teach me that magical secrets can be of use beyond the grave, whereas they can be of immense value to the world.

One of the many illusions I have devised, which I call "Hop it !" is really a double one, for not only does the assistant get out of a tiny cage in which she is securely fastened, but she disappears altogether.

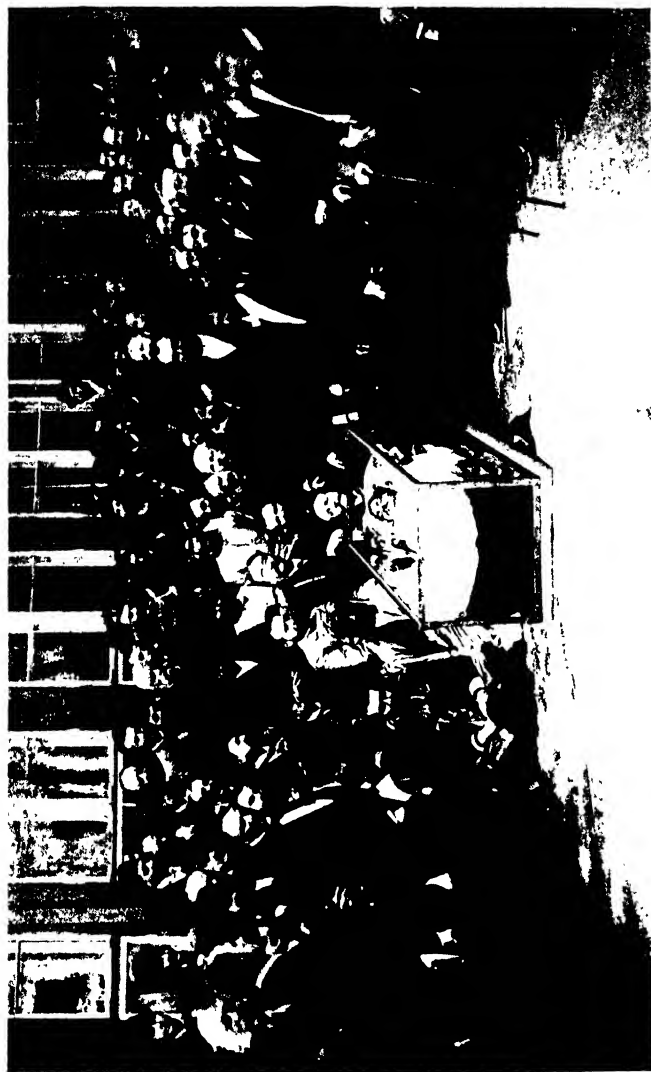
The illusionist begins by knocking the cage and the stand on which it is placed, to show that they are all solid and securely fixed. He then holds a banner in front of the cage for two seconds, and—the girl has disappeared.

An illusion of this kind must be easy ; otherwise, the escape cannot be managed in two seconds. Directly the banner is in front of the cage, a board is pushed out from the back-cloth to the back of the cage ; while this is happening the girl turns round in her "prison " and prepares to escape. Two of the "bars " at the back of the cage are made of thick rubber, painted to resemble iron. The girl, holding one in each hand, pushes these "bars " outwards, and gets through the gap and on to the board, along which she crawls and out through a hole in the back-cloth. Simple, but quite effective.

Equally simple, but much more spectacular, is an illusion I called "The Paddle Wheel."

A girl is strapped to the centre of the wheel, which is lit up with red and white lights. The wheel, with the girl in the centre, is caused to revolve rapidly, but presently the speed diminishes, and finally the wheel comes to a stop. Then the effect of the illusion is plain to all ; the girl has disappeared. Remember, the wheel has been spinning all the time.

The girl herself works this illusion. Directly the wheel is revolving so quickly that the eyes of the audience cannot follow what is happening in the centre of the wheel, she presses three little buttons and three spring blinds encircle the middle of the wheel and thus hide the girl. The blinds are painted with buff-coloured slats, to resemble the real



ERNEST CHEA AFTER THORN AND HIS HYPNOTIC SUBJECT





slats of wood to which the girl is bound, and run in grooves round the wheel so that there is no possibility of one of them getting caught in any way. The red and white lights, in addition to being ornamental, serve a useful purpose by preventing the audience from seeing too closely into the centre of the wheel. One has only to look at the head-lamps of a car to know how difficult it is for the eyesight to penetrate any distance beyond a brilliant light.

Here is a simple little trick that has puzzled thousands of people. The magician shows a small round tin, about as large as a half-pound tin of tobacco, which is obviously empty. He pours water into it and puts the lid on. Having touched the top of the tin with his magic wand, and pronounced a suitable spell over it, he removes the lid and takes from the tin three or four silk handkerchiefs, perfectly dry. He then pours the water out of the tin.

There is a kind of inner lining to the lid, and the base of the "lining" is fine wire netting. This lining is so made that when the lid is put on the tin, the lining comes away from the lid and fits closely into the top of the tin. When the magician takes off the lid, he turns the tin towards him; otherwise the audience would see that the dry handkerchiefs (which, of course, were placed in the "lining" before the trick began) were at the top of the tin, and that would not do. The conjurer, having removed the handkerchiefs, can pour out the water, because it runs through the wire netting.

When I was a young man, and had still my way to make in the world, I was eager to snap up any offer that was made to me. One of my first professional engagements was at a small mining town in South Wales.

In those days—I was twenty-one at the time—I was always anxious to make a big impression, and adopted the then unusual custom of taking my scenery about with me. Arranging that this should be delivered by goods train at the station, I went on ahead to superintend the final arrangements for my show at the local theatre.

To my surprise, there was nobody to greet me when I arrived. The theatre was like a house of death. I was told afterwards that the whole of the theatre staff, including the

orchestra and stage hands, worked in the mines during the day, starting their professional duties only in the evening.

After I had been waiting well over an hour, an aged man put in an appearance. I introduced myself, told him that my scenery was being sent on, and asked him if he knew of anyone who let out apartments.

"Yes," he replied, after some deliberation. "My missus does." He gave me the address, and I set out in great haste, for I was anxious to return to the station to inquire after my "props." Arrived at the house, which was only a few minutes from the station, I knocked sharply on the door. A large female of gaunt and forbidding appearance answered my summons.

"Ur ?" she asked.

"Good morning," I said, in my pleasantest manner. Your husband tells me that you let out rooms. Could you tell me your lowest terms for a week's lodging ?"

"Um. Two guineas a week."

"That seems rather dear," I said. "I happen to be a theatrical artist—in fact, I'm appearing at your theatre this week. What are your very lowest terms for theatrical artists ?"

"Dirty dogs !" was the startling reply, and the door was slammed violently in my face !

At last, however, I managed to fix up a comfortable room. But my satisfaction was short-lived. When I went to the railway station, I was horrified to learn that my scenery had been sent on to another town by mistake. Things looked somewhat serious, and I sought out the manager of the theatre, and explained the whole situation. He received me no more kindly than the landlady.

"Do you know what you are ?" he said. "You're a fraud, that's what you are. You never had no scenery ; you never had nothing. You've come here on false pretences. I've a good mind to call in the police."

"Rubbish," I returned heatedly. "Go down to the station yourself and make inquiries."

Taking me at my word, the manager walked down to the station, where my story was confirmed.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked. "The whole show's ruined, because you were top of the bill."

"You can put me on last," I suggested. "The scenery can't reach here before to-morrow, so I can't do any tricks. But I can do a hypnotism act that ought to satisfy the audience."

"That's no good. They want to see you do magic, and they won't have anything else."

"There's nothing else to be done," I argued. "It's either hypnotism or nothing at all."

"All right, all right," agreed the manager gloomily. "But I warn you—they'll give you a rough time."

I made the most of the short time left at my disposal. My plan of campaign was simple. I visited every public-house in the town, and picked out half a dozen men whose appearance seemed to indicate a fondness for drink.

I took the men round to the back of the theatre, and explained what I wanted them to do. They were to be "horses," a term that is used in the profession for a hypnotist's secret confederates. I told them that they would each receive a shilling and as much beer as it was possible to drink if they would follow my instructions.

When I asked for assistants from the audience, my "horses" were to come on to the stage. Each man was then allotted a different task. One had to chew candles, another was to drink paraffin oil, whilst another was to have needles forced through his cheeks—this last is easily done by pressing the flesh and so making it numb—and so on.

I realised that I was taking an enormous risk, but it was the only way out of my difficulty. The men agreed to help me, and we held an impromptu rehearsal there and then. Everything worked very well, and after binding them to secrecy, I asked them to be in the theatre by ten o'clock the same evening.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said, smiling pleasantly as I greeted my audience. "Owing to unforeseen circumstances, I regret I shall be unable to go through the advertised performance this evening. However, with your permission, I propose to give you an exhibition of my

hypnotic powers." I paused to see how this announcement would be received. There were no comments, so I continued. "For this exhibition, I shall require the assistance of several gentlemen from the audience. Will anyone be kind enough to volunteer?"

At this point my half a dozen "horses" stepped forward, including my regular assistant, who was sitting in the stalls. But to my surprise, they were immediately followed by several other men whom I had never seen before. I was quite unprepared for this development, but I called for several more chairs, set them around in a semicircle, and asked each man to sit down. I found I had fifteen volunteers in all, and I was careful to see that my own assistant was seated on the extreme right. Waving my hands at the latter in what I hoped was a truly impressive manner, I looked him straight in the eyes.

"You are falling asleep," I said in a deep voice. The words were hardly out of my mouth when the assistant fell off his chair, and remained motionless on the ground.

This piece of fooling had a startling effect on the audience. They rose in their seats, and some of the women screamed. The volunteers rushed as one man for the steps that led to the stalls, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded my "horses" to remain on the stage.

The performance continued, and my volunteers played their part well. In turn they ate candles, swallowed oil, and did several other little tricks which I had shown them in the short time at my disposal. When I came to forcing needles through a man's cheeks, several women fainted, and had to be carried out.

Flushed with success, I decided that as a grand finale, I would do a mock marriage scene. Putting the "fluence" on my regular assistant, I told him that he was to represent the bridegroom. He gave me a sly wink, which at the moment I was at a loss to understand.

I turned to one of the "horses," made the same mysterious passes with my hands, and explained that he was to be the bride. I was in the middle of my explanation when an ear-splitting shout caused me to turn my head.

A strange sight met my eyes. My assistant had stripped

himself of every inch of clothing. Waving his shirt above his head, he pranced across the stage. Suddenly he stopped, and, cupping his hands around his mouth, shouted, "Where's my blushing bride?"

I need hardly say that the performance was stopped immediately. The curtain came down amidst shrieks of laughter. Although I spoke severely to my assistant for his unseemly conduct, in reality I had much to thank him for. I played to crowded houses for the rest of the week, and, in spite of the fact that my scenery arrived on the following day, the manager would not allow me to change my programme. Of course, my assistant's eccentric behaviour was deleted from the subsequent performances!

I was so pleased with the success of the show that I paid my "horses" half a crown and as much beer as they could drink for each performance, and, like good fellows, they did not betray the trust I had put in them. In addition, I was able to fool the police and several medical men who called on me and asked for an explanation of my wonderful hypnotic powers.

Many years ago, when the Magic Circle was first formed, I was asked to become a member. At the time I was already a member of the Society of American Magicians, but I knew this would not prevent me from joining the new society. I had felt for some considerable time that a club for professional illusionists in this country would be a very desirable thing, and was therefore only too delighted to accept the invitation for membership that was extended to me. I agreed to give the Magic Circle some publicity in the pages of my own publication, *The Magician*, and to do everything in my power to help the activities of the club.

For a time everything proceeded smoothly. The doings of the Circle were duly recorded in my magazine, and I was extremely happy in the thought that I was, at last, of some material use to the many magicians of this country. After some months, however, the communications and circulars that were always sent to me by the secretary suddenly ceased, and for no apparent reason.

I made several inquiries into the matter, but the replies I received were all evasive, and I was more mystified than

before. It was not long, however, before I heard the explanation. I was informed that the Magic Circle had received a letter purporting to come from myself, stating that I wished to resign. Since I had never written such a letter, the only assumption was that my signature had been forged.

The following day I met the secretary, and asked to be allowed to see the document. Again his replies were evasive, and I was given no satisfaction. Since I feared that my professional reputation might suffer some damage, I called a secret meeting of the great magicians of the country, and put my case before them.

After a good deal of discussion, it was decided that we should form another society to be known as "The Magicians' Club." Harry Houdini, who was in England at the time, was elected president, and myself vice-president. The first meeting was arranged at the Holborn Restaurant in May, 1911, and more than three hundred guests were invited.

The news of our new club soon leaked out, and it came to Houdini's ears that several of the members of the Magic Circle were going to attend our meeting with a view to upsetting the proceedings. In order to safeguard ourselves, it was decided that Houdini and myself should each have a bodyguard of eight well-trained pugilists, who would be able to explain to any would-be hecklers that law and order were desirable.

Houdini occupied the chair. As I was sitting next to him on the platform, I noticed several members of the Magic Circle congregated together on one side of the hall. No sooner had the chairman started his speech than a whole volley of remarks was fired at him.

"There's only room for one society, and that's already in existence." "Even if you are Houdini and can escape from handcuffs, it doesn't mean that you can run a magical society." These and other less polite remarks caused incessant interruptions.

At last, Houdini gave a prearranged sign. Thereupon sixteen men from the back of the hall walked slowly forward, and gradually surrounded the hecklers. There

was no disorder, no stampeding. But as the interrupters realised that sixteen hefty pugilists were giving them their undivided attention, they grew strangely silent. There were no further interruptions during the meeting.

A number of membership forms were handed round amongst the guests towards the close of the proceedings. One hundred and eighty-nine of these were eventually returned filled, and from that day the Magicians' Club has never looked back.

As time went on, the members of the Magic Circle learnt that the Magicians' Club was doing much to further the interests of magic, not only in England, but all over the world. Members of the rival society were invited to attend our functions, and much of the bad feeling which formerly existed has long since disappeared. Indeed, if the figures of the J. N. Maskelyne Memorial Fund, of which I have the honour to be a trustee, were to be examined, it would be found that the members of the Magicians' Club have subscribed to a very generous degree. I should add that the great John Nevil Maskelyne was probably the greatest opponent that our club has ever had.

For a long time past the Magic Circle and the Magicians' Club have been on the most friendly terms, for, in endeavouring to further the interests of magic throughout the world, they have a common cause. It is interesting to note that, although John Nevil Maskelyne told me plainly that he had no use for the Magicians' Club, his son, Nevil, willingly joined our society, and before his death was elected to the position of vice-president. There are many magicians at the present time who are members of both institutions, and speak as highly of one as they do of the other.

A fellow magician once referred to me as "The Mystery Man of Mystery Men." This may or may not have been intended as a compliment. It is a fact, however, that for many years I succeeded in baffling—perhaps I should say hoodwinking—many of the greatest magicians of my time.

How does Will Goldston know? That is the question which Harry Houdini, Carl Hertz, John Nevil Maskelyne, David Devant, Chung Ling Soo, and many others have



asked themselves repeatedly in the past. All these men have, from time to time, been exceedingly vexed, not to say incensed, with me. Not one was ever able to understand how I was able to explain the full details and working of his latest tricks and illusions. This was a cause of secret satisfaction to myself and of considerable irritation to the others.

It was even whispered that I employed a sort of intelligence service to discover the secrets of my brother magicians. My hired spies, it was rumoured, visited the various magical workshops, and either by bribery or force, found out the secrets of the newest illusions under construction.

David Devant was my victim on more than one occasion. Many people will still recall his excellent "Spelling Fish" effect at Maskelyne's Theatre. In this, he presented a large bowl filled with goldfish. The letters of the alphabet, printed on small white cards, were dropped into the bowl, and any word given by a member of the audience was spelt out by the letters with uncanny accuracy.

The trick was worked by a number of silver wires in the water, controlled by a button-hook beneath the stage. I published a full working explanation of the trick in one of my *Magicians' Annuals*, including an accurate design of the button-hook. On another occasion I congratulated him on his improvement in the "Magic Kettle" trick, when he was able to pour out any named drink from a tin kettle. This trick had been done before, but the latest improvement, known only to Devant and his mechanic, was effected by means of a number of rubber tubes in the handle. He was astounded when I told him how it was done.

John Nevil Maskelyne was another whose secrets were often known to me. I recall meeting him on one occasion in the foyer of St. George's Hall.

"Well, Goldston," said he, "have you discovered any new secrets?"

"Plenty," I replied shortly.

"There's one you don't know, at any rate," he retorted. "I'm building an illusion now, and not even Devant knows about it. It will cause a big sensation."



CHEPALO AS THE GUEST OF INDIAN MAGICIANS



I made no answer. As a matter of fact, I knew all about Maskelyne's new trick, and was determined to spring a surprise on him. It was an exceedingly clever effect which was to be known as "The Entranced Fakir." A man and a wicker basket were to be introduced to the audience. The man was to step into the basket, which by some invisible means suspended itself in the air. At a given signal the basket was to fall to the ground, showing that its occupant had completely vanished.

The following day I called on Maskelyne, and showed him the complete plans of his new illusion. For a moment I feared he had lost his reason. His eyes got bigger and bigger, and he muttered all sorts of dire imprecations under his breath.

"How did you know?" he cried, when he had sufficiently recovered to speak.

"Even the walls have ears," I said, picking up my hat, "but believe me, your secret will be quite safe."

I left him still staring at the prints.

Shortly afterwards I heard he had completely destroyed his half-finished apparatus. There was no doubt that the great John Nevil was sorely vexed with Will Goldston. I thought it a pity he had acted so childishly, for the illusion was most ingenious, and would have been a great success.

But my greatest triumph in this respect concerns Houdini, who guarded his secrets more jealously than any magician I ever met. He had an excellent opening trick in which he called a committee of the audience on to the stage. After his mouth had been carefully examined, he apparently swallowed two dozen loose needles and several yards of cotton. Then he took a drink from a tumbler of water. The climax was reached when he produced the cotton from his mouth with the *twenty-four needles threaded on it*. This was one of Harry's most baffling tricks, and, incidentally, one of his favourites.

I told him exactly how he concealed the duplicate needles and cotton in his mouth, and in what manner he hid them from the eyes of the examining committee. Houdini became exceedingly angry, and demanded that

I should tell him how I came by my knowledge. But I preferred to keep my secret.

Things got to such a pitch that several well-known illusionists employed a detective to shadow me. They were determined at all costs to discover how their secrets leaked out. But when they found I attended at my office and carried out my regular business routine each day, they became more perplexed than ever.

There is now no reason why I should not make the truth known. I have had my laughs, and I feel it is time the "spy" theory was exploded for ever. It is pure fiction. *Never at any time have I bribed information, or broken into the workshops of my brother magicians.*

My sole means of getting information was—professional jealousy. Magicians, as a whole, are a highly jealous race. Thus, if Will Smith's handkerchief illusion is better than Fred Jones's rice bowls, then there is bound to be bad feeling on the part of Fred. Consequently he is only too eager to probe into Will's secrets, and, if possible, expose them. And so Fred comes to Will Goldston with excitement dancing in his eyes.

"Do you know how Willie does his handkerchiefs?" he asks. "Well, it's like this . . ."; and he goes on to give me the full details of Willie's wonderful trick. "You can publish that in your next book, can't you?" he says, hopefully.

That is my secret. Of course, my own knowledge as an inventor of magical apparatus has helped me considerably in putting two and two together. But my so-called "spies" were none other than the very magicians who wondered how I knew their tricks!

One fine spring morning, some twenty or so years ago, a stranger walked into my office, and told my secretary that he would like to talk over some private business with me. He was shown to my room, and introduced himself as Charles Denny. He was a quietly-spoken individual, of striking appearance, and looked more like a well-to-do business man than anything else.

"Mr. Goldston," he said, taking the seat that I had indicated, "I want you to build some illusions for me. I

have just come into some money, which will enable me to have tricks constructed from my own ideas."

My visitor handed me a packet of plans, which I scrutinised carefully, for I had never previously heard of him, and doubted whether he had the ability to think out an effective illusion. But to my astonishment I found the tricks to be exceedingly clever and original. One effect, in which a woman was to be produced from a box hardly big enough to hold a baby, was particularly good. Denny told me that he had thought this would be a suitable trick to close his act.

I agreed to undertake the work, and asked him to call again in a few weeks' time, when the whole series of illusions would be ready. He came at the appointed time and expressed his full approval of the way in which I handled the work.

"I think the tricks are very good, Mr. Denny," I said. "It would be a pity to spoil them through lack of good workmanship."

"I quite agree," was the reply. "As a matter of fact, I am booked for a week at the Putney Hippodrome from next Monday, and I want everything to be in apple-pie order. Do you think you could attend the dress rehearsal on Sunday, just to supervise the preliminary working of the illusions? I will pay you £50 for the trouble."

Although it was not my habit to work on Sundays, I thought this too good an opportunity to be missed, and readily agreed to his proposal. Denny hastened to add that he would have everything ready for me, so that I should be saved as much trouble as possible.

The following Sunday was extremely hot, and when I arrived at the Putney Hippodrome, I suggested to Denny that we should take a cold lunch before we settled down to business. The conjurer was hot and tired, for he had already put in two or three hours' work, and was only too willing to fall in with my suggestion. He insisted on paying me my fee there and then, although I had not yet started on the rehearsals, telling me that it might otherwise slip his memory.

After lunch the weather seemed to get hotter than ever.

"What about a sail on the river before we go back to the theatre?" Denny suggested. "I think it's really too warm to start work just yet, don't you?"

We walked along the river-side, and chose a comfortable looking boat, which we thought would suit our purpose. Telling the boatman we should be out for probably an hour or so, we hoisted our sails, and set off at a spanking pace in the direction of Hammersmith. The fresh river breeze was delightfully cool after the town air, and I rested back on the cushions feeling at peace with the whole world.

As I was congratulating myself on earning the easiest £50 of my life, a startled exclamation from my companion caused me to turn my head.

"Good God!" gasped Denny.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"The girl!"

I looked about me.

"I don't see a girl," I replied.

"The girl in the box!"

"Box? What box? I can't see a box either."

"My assistant! You remember the illusion in which I produce her from a foot square box? Well, I locked her up before you arrived at the theatre, and I've forgotten all about her! It's your fault for suggesting the lunch."

I ignored his last remark, for at the moment I was too agitated to reply.

"Good heavens, man!" I cried at length. "The girl must be dead. Let's hurry back. We may be in time yet."

We turned the prow of our small craft towards Putney and, with all sails set, and two pairs of oars working at top speed, we headed for the boathouse. We must have covered the distance in record time, but to our tortured minds it seemed that we would never reach land.

At last, however, we drew up by the landing-stage. We ran along the river-side as fast as our legs would carry us, for every second gained might be the difference between life and death to the unfortunate assistant. People gaped at us with open mouths, no doubt assuming that the intense heat

had affected our sanity. I can honestly say that I have never run harder in my life.

We brushed past the astonished doorkeeper of the theatre, and hurried through to the wings. There, in the centre of the stage, stood the box, ominously still and silent. In an instant Denny was on his hands and knees, fumbling with the lock.

“For God’s sake hurry!” I said excitedly.

The lid sprang open, and Denny took one look inside. Then he turned towards me, his face as white as a sheet.

“It’s no good, Goldston,” he said. “She’s dead.”

The poor girl was lying in a huddled heap in the secret partition of the box. But with Denny’s help, I managed to get her out, and it was soon apparent to both of us that we had arrived just in time. She was not dead, but had been unconscious for some considerable time. We splashed her face with cold water, and fanned her with our coats. To our relief, the treatment proved effective, and in a short while she was sitting by our sides, pale and shaken, but otherwise none the worse for her unpleasant adventure.

“Thank God!” said Denny. Those two words were more expressive than any speech I ever heard.

Against my advice, the conjurer decided he would do no more rehearsing. I urged the necessity of trying through the new tricks at least once before the public performance on the morrow. But Denny would not hear of it.

“I’ve had enough for one day,” he said, mopping his perspiring brow.



## CHAPTER XXII

### "THE MAN WHO MADE ICE FAMOUS"

**T**HERE is nothing more annoying to the average Englishman than a disturbance at his breakfast table. It was, therefore, in no pleasant frame of mind that I left my eggs and bacon to answer the impatient ringing of the telephone bell one spring morning fifteen years ago.

"Hello," I cried, as I took up the receiver. "What the deuce do you want?"

It was the secretary in my office. Mr. Frank Van Hoven had called and would like to see Mr. Goldston. He wanted to see Mr. Goldston right now. He wasn't in? Well, then, perhaps the secretary would ring up Mr. Goldston and tell him to step along. Mr. Van Hoven wanted to talk big business. Yes, he would wait.

I hastily swallowed the remainder of my breakfast and took a taxi along to Leicester Square. My feeling of annoyance had given way to one of genuine pleasure. Van Hoven's reputation had preceded him from America, and I took it as no small compliment that he should visit me so shortly after he had arrived in this country.

For some time we discussed various mutual friends in the profession. "By the way," said Van Hoven suddenly, "I've heard a deal about you in America. I want to place a big order with you. I'll take some of the stuff now. And in case I forget, you might drop into the Finsbury Park Empire to-night. I'm giving my first show in England, and I'd like you to be there. Now, about these tricks . . ."

He proceeded to choose a large number of illusions which he intended to take away with him. To my utter astonishment he picked on tricks that were suitable for the crudest amateurs, simple effects that delight the average schoolboy.

I made no remark, however, and assisted him with his purchases to a waiting taxi.

I naturally assumed that Van Hoven intended to use the tricks in his performance that same evening. But again I was in for a surprise. The conjurer simply went through his usual foolery of smashing up ice, spilling water over his assistants, lighting innumerable candles with an endless supply of matches and so on.

At the end of the performance he was called on to make a speech. He thanked the audience for their great kindness, and told them how pleased he was to receive such a magnificent reception on his first appearance in England. Incidentally, he paid me a very pretty compliment.

He explained that he had bought a certain number of books and illusions from me that very morning. “They are tricks that I have always wanted,” he murmured, in a voice so hushed that it was difficult to hear exactly what he said. “They are lying beneath the stage now—I don’t suppose I shall ever have the opportunity of giving a public performance with them. But when I first started as a magician I determined I would get those tricks. And now my wish is realised.” He added a few words in praise of myself.

“I know you are disappointed, Goldston,” he said to me, a few minutes later, in his dressing-room. “But I meant what I said out there on the stage. As a matter of fact, I don’t know a damn thing about magic. That’s one of the greatest sorrows of my life.”

Truly a strange confession for a professional magician! Poor Frank! His life was something in the nature of a tragedy. His one ambition was to be an illusionist; he was cast by the hand of Fate into the role of a jester. And, although in his own form of entertainment he was a wonderful success, I incline to the belief that he put himself down as one of life’s failures.

I can still recollect the pathetic speech he made at the Magicians’ Club. His cheery personality soon endeared itself to the members, and before he returned to America he was presented with an illuminated address and silver casket.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said in a broken voice, "this is the only occasion in my life I have been honoured. You have seen my performance; you know it for a ridiculous burlesque. But I hope from the bottom of my heart that the day is not far distant when I shall be able to show you a genuine magical performance." That day never came.

Van Hoven started life as a peanut seller in the fair grounds of America. That he was not a success in this simple walk of life is no reflection on his character. But the fact remains that he never held the same job for more than a month on end. Nor was this to be wondered at. No reasonable employer could be expected to retain a youth whose chief hobby seemed to be smashing bottles and leaving the broken glass in untidy heaps around his stall.

The truth of the matter was that Frank had decided to become a bottle juggler. He accordingly bought up all the empty bottles he could lay his hands on, and, in the intervals of serving peanuts, practised until his arms ached.

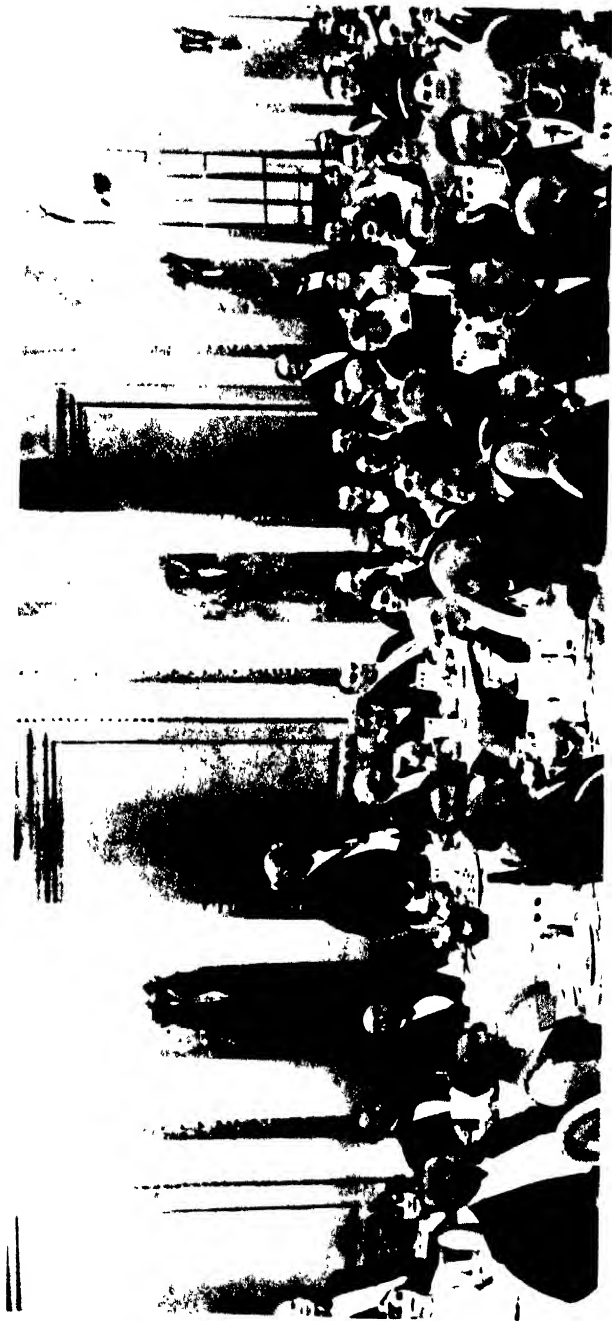
One day, as he was swinging his bottles through the air, he attracted the attention of a professional conjurer named Jenson, who later became famous under the stage name of Dante.

"So you're trying to be a juggler?" said Jenson, not a little puzzled by the other's amateurish antics.

"Trying is the right word," returned Van Hoven. "I haven't got the hang of things yet. But one of these days I am going to make my fortune at this game. You'll see my name in the lights over Broadway—'Frank Van Hoven, the World's Greatest Bottle Juggler.'"

"I'm glad to hear it," was the encouraging reply. "I guess you'll have to make a lot of money to pay for all the bottles you've broken. If you're really interested, you had better come and practise on the stage at my theatre. You can put a mattress down, and the bottles won't break. That'll save you the trouble of sweeping up all the broken glass."

Van Hoven was delighted to have somebody take an interest in his efforts, and duly presented himself at the theatre. But no sooner had he seen Jenson give a conjuring



THE ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE MAGICIANS' CLUB

Mr. Louis Gaultier, President, is seen standing. Mr. Goldston is on his right, and others seen include Sir Denison Ross, Mr. H. W. Nevins, and Mr. Hannen Swaffer.



performance than he decided to give up juggling in favour of magic.

Again Jenson was willing to help. He gave the ambitious youth several lessons in magic, and told him to purchase some cheap apparatus from Roterburg of Chicago. But Van Hoven was either lacking in imagination or else was extremely ungrateful. He purchased the same tricks that Jenson himself was using, and even went so far as to steal his tutor's patter.

If a prize had been offered for the world's worst conjurer, Van Hoven would have won it hands down. It is true that he managed to obtain several engagements, but he never gave more than one performance at each theatre. After his first show, the manager invariably greeted him with the phrase, “You're fired—beat it!” And poor Frank, together with the tricks he performed so badly, was bundled unceremoniously into the street.

At last he decided to try his luck in New York. Jenson strongly advised him not to do so, and told him there would be little hope of success in the capital if he had been a failure in the small towns of the Middle West. But Van Hoven was nothing if not ambitious, and decided to take his chance. It was the luckiest thing he ever did.

He managed to obtain an engagement at a small picture theatre in the New York suburbs. It so happened that an important booking agent dropped into the theatre on business, and, quite by chance, he saw the magician's performance.

“That's the rottenest act I've ever seen,” he told the manager. “In fact, he's so rotten that he's really good. As a conjurer he's a flop, but as a turn to raise the laughs he's great.”

It was about this time that Van Hoven adopted the slapstick programme which eventually made him famous. The idea was taken to America by an English conjurer named William J. Hillier. Van Hoven saw Hillier's performance, and decided to use it as his own. By such small things can a man be made.

From that moment Van Hoven never looked back. The theatrical agent mentioned his name to Hammerstein,

the variety magnate of America, who gave him several important bookings. Frank decided to go in for laughter-raising rather than rabbit-producing. His turn in which the four boy assistants were made to perform all sorts of nonsensical absurdities, was declared to be the funniest thing America had seen for years.

Frank's slogan—"The Man Who Made Ice Famous"—was first suggested by myself.

Van Hoven was a kindly soul. There were occasions when his generosity astounded even his closest friends, and many of his less fortunate fellow artists had been grateful for his brotherly assistance.

Some people have described him as "the luckiest magician of the two continents." This is not quite true. Although there is not the slightest doubt that Dame Fortune took a kindly interest in him throughout most of his life, I have known occasions when his luck was anything but good.

Frank was a great philosopher. Nothing ever worried him much. "I don't mind," he would say when things went wrong. "It'll turn out all right in the long run." Subsequent events usually proved him right. The following little story of his concern for the misfortunes of a fellow artist may not, I think, be without interest.

In 1918, Van Hoven was performing in vaudeville in Chicago. One of the other artists at the theatre was, to use Frank's own words, "getting it pretty rough." Connubial bliss was at a discount. This particular man performed in a double act with his wife, and it was soon apparent to all behind the scenes that it was this good lady who really "bossed" the partnership. As an assistant in the double act she was admirable, but her decided views on the rights and privileges of a wife did not tend to increase the happiness of her sadly misunderstood husband.

One day Frank called the man aside and boldly asked him why he allowed his wife to make his life so miserable.

"Why don't you divorce her? It's easy enough."

"I've got no money for that."

"Suppose I give it to you?"

"What!"

"Suppose I give you the money to divorce your wife?"

"You mean that?"

"Sure."

"God bless you then! It seems too good to be true!"

And that was that. Frank duly found the necessary money, and the divorce was carried through. It was a happy day for the little vaudeville artist when he found himself a free man.

And so, for a short time, the wife fades from our picture. But you can't keep a masterful woman down. When next we hear of her, she is Mrs. Frank Van Hoven, though the couple were subsequently divorced.

With the passage of time, Van Hoven and I became great friends. One evening, I called on him at the Victoria Palace. He walked out from the wings accompanied by a man whom I recognised as an old assistant I had sacked for dishonesty.

"Hello, Frank," I said, extending my hand. "How's the show going?"

Van Hoven looked at me without smiling. "I'm afraid I'm too busy to bother with you just at present, Mr. Goldston," he said. "Another time, perhaps." And, turning on his heel, he walked through to his dressing-room.

To say that I was surprised would be stating things mildly. To receive a public rebuff from such an old friend was a great shock to me. And it was not until a year afterwards that an explanation was forthcoming.

Twelve months later, Van Hoven called on me, accompanied by a lady friend. My secretary intimated that I was too busy to see him. Later the same day he called alone and told me the whole story. It appeared that my ex-assistant had told Van Hoven that I had described him as "the rottenest conjurer in the world." Such a statement was entirely untrue. Although I had no illusions as to the American's magical ability, I had never made any public statement which might have been at all damaging to his reputation.

I saw Frank on only one further occasion after that. In November, 1928, he walked into my office, and I found him



strangely changed. His first action was to offer me a further apology for his conduct.

"Forget it, Frank," I said, shaking him warmly by the hand. "These little upsets in life often happen."

My companion's gaze rested on a photo of Houdini which hangs above my desk.

"Life, Will? Yes, it's a funny thing. I wonder what it all means. There's poor Houdini—he's gone. My mother died recently. That was a sad blow to me—she was a great woman."

He leaned back in his chair, wrapped in contemplation. I had not the courage to break in on his thoughts.

At last he spoke again. "Will, you know what sort of a chap I am. I've led a pretty racy life up to now, haven't I?"

"Well, er—a trifle Bohemian," I assented.

"Exactly. Women and wine. It's amusing for a time, but it's a shallow life, a rotten life. I'm changed completely. The deaths of Houdini and my mother have affected me more than any man will ever guess. Don't laugh at me, Will, but I believe I've become religious. At any rate, I'm sure there's something in religion, isn't there?" He looked at me with something akin to tears in his eyes.

"Sure," I said slowly. I felt strangely sad, for it takes no small amount of courage for a man to lay bare his soul to another.

Poor Frank. Within three months he was dead.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### AN UNDERTAKER'S INTERRUPTION

**T**HE Great Raymond is an American magician, who, I must admit, is not without a certain amount of conjuring ability. But, like Alfred the Great who burnt the housewife's cakes through inattention, Raymond had other interests in life besides magic. Consequently he did not meet with the success he otherwise would have done. His motto was "Pleasure first, business afterwards."

One Monday morning just after the War, Raymond walked into my office and told me that he was playing on a percentage basis at the Queen's Theatre, Poplar.

"I wish you luck," I said, hoping he would make a hurried exit, for I was busy with other matters.

"Thanks," he grinned. "I know I shall be a success. On Friday I'm having a special night, and I'd like you to come down. I'm doing a new coffin escape that's the absolute goods. It's been well advertised, and I have issued a challenge. I guess there'll be a big crowd."

"I suppose you know they're a pretty rough crowd down Poplar way," I told him. "If you don't satisfy them, they'll make things pretty uncomfortable for you."

"That's all right," he returned. "The rougher they are the better I shall like them. But promise me you will come down—I'd like you to see the act."

"Righto. I'll be there," I said.

As Raymond had predicted, the theatre was packed on the following Friday evening. I arrived just as his turn was due to begin, and was given a seat in the front row of the stalls.

When the coffin was brought on the stage, I was struck with the crudeness of its design. It was obviously artificial, and secretly I admired Raymond's pluck in bringing it

before a hard-boiled English audience. The wood was cheap and thin ; this in itself was bad enough, for every conjurer worthy of the name knows that one of the first rules of his business is to convince the onlookers that his apparatus is quite genuine. But, to make matters worse, the lid was fastened with large butterfly nuts. Most people are aware that a real coffin is fastened down with screws which lie flush with the surface of the lid.

The performer, however, appeared quite unconcerned. Walking to the front of the stage, he bowed, and addressed himself to the audience :

“ Ladies and gentlemen, I am about to perform the most extraordinary coffin escape that has ever been seen,” he said. “ In the course of my career, I have escaped from coffins, boxes, locks, and chains, and have never once been defeated. This coffin has been made for me by a well-known firm of undertakers. If several gentlemen——”

“ Name the firm ! ” The interruption came from a rosy-faced gentleman who had risen to his feet in the front of the stalls. Raymond, however, took no notice, and continued his discourse.

“ If several gentlemen would step up on the stage to act as a committee, and screw me in the coffin, I should feel greatly obliged.”

At this, a dozen men rose to their feet, and made their way to the stage. I noticed that the red-checked interrupter was among them.

No sooner had the men taken their place on the stage than the man once more demanded to know the name of the makers of the coffin.

“ I’m an undertaker in Poplar,” he shouted. “ I don’t like the looks of that there coffin. Come on, guv’nor, who made it for you ? ”

Raymond smiled sweetly.

“ As a matter of fact, sir,” he said, “ a representative of the firm is in the theatre to-night. No doubt he will confirm all I have told you.” As he spoke, he pointed towards me. “ Perhaps you would be good enough to come on to the stage, and tell the audience about the coffin.”

This was a contingency for which I was quite unprepared.

In my own mind I knew that Raymond was thoroughly scared. Unless I could help him his act would be a failure, and I went on to the stage wondering desperately what I should say.

However, I managed to tell the audience that I was a representative of Jones and Howard (hoping fervently that no such firm existed), the well-known West End undertakers. Mr. Raymond, I said, had commissioned us to make the coffin, and the result of our labours was lying on the stage. Although the coffin had been made to special measurements, there was absolutely no trickery about it—at this point I perspired profusely—and it would indeed be a miraculous thing if Mr. Raymond were able to get out. I added that I should be pleased to assist in the screwing down, and do all that was in my power to prevent an escape.

This speech seemed to satisfy the audience. The coffin was examined, Raymond placed inside, and the lid screwed down. Of course, he succeeded in getting out, and the show proved a success.

But it was a near thing ! Whenever I think of Raymond, I visualise that terrible coffin made by “ Jones and Howard ” !

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PRINCE WHO STABBED HIS PARTNER

**N**OT long ago, when looking through some old books, I came across my diary for 1915. Among the entries for July, I found the words "Prince Askedop stabbed his partner," and the whole story came back to me. I recalled the adventure of the dusky Prince and his unfortunate partner, Primo Mulatti, as vividly as if they had been standing at my side.

It was in the early part of the month that I first encountered the Prince. He walked into my office one hot morning, and flung himself into an easy-chair. He was a fine figure of a man, quite six feet in height, and his coal-black skin and thick woolly hair told me he came from West Africa.

"Good morning," he said, grinning from ear to ear. "You Mr. Goldston?"

"That's me," I returned. "I haven't seen you before, have I?"

"No, sir. I'm Prince Acid Drop."

"Acid Drop?"

"Sure. My friends call me Acid Drop. My real name is Askedop—I'm a prince in my own land. Can you build me real magic show?"

"Certainly," I assented. "How much do you want to spend?"

"About three hundred pounds, sir."

"Righto. What do you know about magic?"

"Nothin'."

"Ah, that's awkward. What sort of illusions do you want?"

"Don't know."

"That's more awkward still."

"Wait a minute—to call my partner. He got the money, sir." As he spoke, my prospective client rose to his feet and walked to the door. "Primo," he bellowed, in a voice of thunder.

He was answered by rapid footsteps on the office stairs, and a second later a weedy little individual entered the room. His clothes had obviously been made for another man, and his appearance was not enhanced by a number of dark food-stains which decorated the lapels of his jacket.

"This is Mr. Primo Mulatti," said the Prince. "He's a waiter, and also my partner."

Mr. Mulatti was evidently a man who knew his business. He told me exactly what sort of illusions he required, and explained that Prince Askedop would present them, whilst he himself acted only as business manager. I told him I should be pleased to make his apparatus, and hastily added I should want £150 left as a deposit. I did not feel inclined to run any risks with such queer clients.

"Certainly," replied Mulatti, who spoke perfect English. "I'll give it to you now." He pulled his tie from beneath his waistcoat, and exposed a huge metal safety-pin. This he undid, and, inserting his hand into that part of the tie where the lining usually lies, he pulled out a bunch of five-pound notes.

I watched this proceeding in amazement.

"That's the queerest place for keeping money I've ever seen," I ventured.

"The notes are all good," came the quick reply, "and they're safer there than in a bank." He counted out thirty, and pushed them across the table to me. "That's right, I think."

I checked the amount, and made out a receipt.

"I can have those things ready for you in ten days' time," I said. "All the tricks are simple to operate, so there will not be much chance of the Prince making a mistake."

"That's fine," returned Mulatti. "So long as I know when everything will be prepared, I can start fixing my engagements."

On the following morning, Prince Askedop again came in to see me.

"When will de tricks be finished, Mr. Goldston?" he asked placidly.

"I told you yesterday they would take ten days to complete," I said, somewhat annoyed at the unnecessary intrusion.

"Three hundred pounds is good order for you, eh?"

"Very good," I agreed.

"Then you give me fifty pounds, eh?"

"Fifty pounds! Whatever for?"

"You give me fifty pounds or I tell partner de tricks is no good."

"You swindling nigger!" I cried, forgetting myself in the heat of the moment. "So you're trying to double-cross your partner?"

In a few well-chosen words I told the Prince just what I thought of him. He did not seem at all abashed at the strength of my language, and took his departure promising to visit me again at an early date. He kept his word. He called every day for the next ten days, on the pretext of inquiring "just how the tricks was goin'." He always contrived to work the question of a bribe of £50 into his conversation, only to meet with the same flat refusal. I at last gave him a small trick table, and he was frank enough to tell me that this pleased him far more than "any ole fifty pounds." The table was worth about thirty shillings, but I did not trouble to point this out to him.

Meanwhile, Mulatti had not been idle. Most of the managers he approached refused to engage Prince Askedop until they had seen him perform. The Italian eventually persuaded an East End manager to give him a week's trial run, this meaning that Askedop had to work a week for nothing.

On the opening night, Askedop was sitting in his dressing-room, making up as an Eastern mystic. Mulatti went in to see him in order to make the final arrangements for the presentation of the act.

"What do you want in my dressing-room?" demanded

the Prince, turning round as the Italian entered. "You get out here, quick, please!"

"Don't talk such nonsense," said Mulatti. "As your manager I've got a perfect right to come here—as much right as you have."

"Get out here at once, please. You my manager round de front, but not in de dressin'-room."

"You're mad. I shall stop here as long as I like."

Prince Askedop wasted no further words in argument. With one swift motion he drew a knife from his pocket and stabbed Mulatti in the back.

So the partners Askedop and Mulatti never gave their first performance. For at the time the dusky magician was supposed to present his act, he was sitting in a police cell musing on the bitterness of Fate.



## CHAPTER XXV

### CEELEY AND THE NAKED LADY

**I**N the early days of the War, a magician known in England as "The Great Ceeley" walked into my office, and told me that he needed advice. He went on to explain that he wanted a pretty girl assistant who could do some quick costume changing for him. He had arranged an illusion in which a girl was to appear in the dress of a British soldier, a Belgian soldier, and Britannia, all within the space of a few seconds.

I suggested that he would do well to insert an advertisement in a professional paper called *The Stage*. He thanked me for my advice, and took his leave, promising to let me know the result.

A few days later he again came to see me. Pointing his thumbs to the ceiling, he cried: "I've got her, Will. She's a real peach—the very girl I wanted."

"Is she good to look at?" I asked.

"Er—well, she's got nice hair," he replied guardedly. "I'd like you to fit her up with the costumes, old man. I'll send her along for the fittings."

On the following day the lady in question presented herself. She was by no means pretty, but had a beautiful mass of auburn hair that stretched below her waist.

My assistant measured her for the three costumes, and explained how she would have to work them. First of all she had to put on the uniform of a British Tommy, then the Belgian uniform, and lastly the Britannia dress. Each costume was to be fitted with a different shaped button attached to a hidden cord. By pulling the first button, the British uniform would collapse, leaving her dressed as a Belgian soldier. The next button left her as Britannia,

and the last button enabled her to discard the Britannia dress when her show was finished.

The girl agreed that the instructions were quite simple, and said she would call in a week's time, when the costumes would be ready. I urged the necessity of trying the effect over in my rehearsal rooms in order to avoid the possibility of a mistake on the stage.

On the day of the appointment, Ceeley himself called with his assistant. It so happened that there were three or four other theatrical men in my office at the time, and Ceeley invited them to see the rehearsal. The girl quickly changed into her costumes—they fitted perfectly—and I went over the instructions once again.

"When I say 'pull,' " I told her, "you must pull the first button, and stand at attention as a Belgian soldier."

"Right," said the lady. "Go ahead."

We took up our positions in the rehearsal room, and the girl walked in dressed as a British soldier. She did her posing well.

"That's good," I cried. "Now—pull!"

She pulled—and stood dutifully at attention. For a few seconds there was a deathly silence.

Then we all made a blackguard rush for the door, leaving the poor girl standing in the middle of the floor. *She had pulled all three buttons, and every stitch of clothing had fallen from her!*

## CHAPTER XXVI

### DANTE'S "DISAPPEARING LADY"

**I**T is not often that magicians are puzzled. Their business is to see that what to them appears simple must remain a matter of mystery to the uninitiated public. But Dante, the well-known American magician, was considerably puzzled when appearing at Proctor's Theatre, New York, in 1919.

During his performances Dante had occasion to use the "run down"—the small bridge from the stage which gives a performer access to the stalls. He was perplexed to notice a very powerfully built, shabbily dressed negro occupying one of the best stalls in the theatre. This in itself was strange enough, but when the negro appeared in the same seat at every single performance, the mystery became deeper still.

After he had given his last show, the conjurer returned to his dressing-room, and mentioned the matter to his wife. As they were discussing the affair, there was a tap at the door, and the call-boy entered.

"Well?" asked Dante.

"'Scuse me, sir, there's a nigger downstairs says he wants to see you on very important business."

"Aha," smiled Dante. "The mystery man himself. Show him up, George."

The negro entered, smiled across at Madame Dante, and threw himself without invitation into an arm-chair.

"Say, boss," he said, "where dat woman go?"

"Woman?" asked the conjurer. "What woman?"

"Dat woman on de stage."

"Oh, you mean the vanishing lady trick. She vanished by magic."

"Magic, eh? Could yo' vanish me like dat?"

"Certainly."

"Yo' could vanish me anywhere, boss?"

"No. Only on the stage. It's a special stage illusion."

"How much you charge to make me one like dat?"

"My price would be six hundred dollars. But I'm sorry I couldn't make one for you. It's an exclusive secret."

Here followed a somewhat heated argument, but Dante was adamant. The negro finally took his departure, looking extremely dejected and downhearted.

The following week a very flash young man called on Dante. He was anxious to get to business.

"What can I do for you?" asked the magician.

"The Vanishing Lady Trick," was the quick reply. "I have got a customer for you. He wants to buy the illusion, lock, stock, and barrel."

"Is it a negro?"

"Yes."

"Well, I saw him last week. I told him my price was six hundred dollars in the ordinary way. But I didn't make one for him."

"Well, he still wants one. I'm acting for him, and I can offer you a thousand dollars. Perhaps you can run down with me. It will only take you five minutes."

Still extremely perplexed, Dante consented to visit the negro. The young man escorted him to an old wooden shack where his prospective client was sitting staring at a small stone which he held in his hand.

"Good afternoon, boss," said the dusky one.

"Good afternoon," returned Dante.

"See here, boss, yo' must make dat vanishing trick fo' me. I got plenty of money." He produced a cheque book. Then he held the stone up for the magician's benefit. "Dis here's a magic stone. Dis young man tell me that if I buy yo' trick fo' thousand dollars, and rubs dis stone for thirty nights, I can vanish any time, anywhere."

"That's right," the young man whispered to Dante. "He'll believe anything. We can fleece him easy."

"You dirty dog," cried Dante. "I'll not be party to any swindle." He turned again to the nigger. "What do you

want to vanish for ? ” he asked. “ Are you going in for bootlegging ? ”

“ Mebbe yes, mebbe no, boss. But in any case I wants to vanish.”

Dante turned to the door.

“ I can’t vanish you—nor can anyone else. You keep your money in your pocket, Sambo. It’s safer there than anywhere else.”

When Dante was performing at the Casino Theatre, Buenos Aires, towards the end of 1928, he was approached by a German syndicate with a view to making an eight weeks’ tour of Russia. At that time the conjurer was working with the Howard Thurston Road Show, and he was offered a thousand dollars a week, together with the salaries of his twelve assistants and the cost of moving his twelve tons of sceneries and baggage.

The offer was too good to refuse, and Dante took the whole company across to Germany in order to sign up the contract. Four days’ further travelling brought him to Moscow. He was met at the station by a well-dressed and extremely courteous official, who addressed him in perfect English. After the usual exchange of formalities, the man drew Dante to one side and spoke to him in a low voice.

“ Mr. Dante,” he said, “ I need hardly say that I hope your engagement with us will be a great success. I believe it will be. However, Russia is not America, and although you will not be restricted in any way, I must ask you to overlook one or two small matters of personal comfort which may disturb you.

“ You will find the food different from that which you eat in your own country. It takes getting used to. As regards accommodation—yourself, your family, and your assistants will have the best we can offer. We prefer to treat you as Russians rather than foreigners.”

Dante thanked the stranger for his courtesy, and proceeded to the address that had been given him. He located the house after some difficulty, and was immediately shown the rooms which had been set aside for his disposal. They were spacious and scrupulously clean, but owing to the musty atmosphere and the decaying condition of the



**A TYPICAL MAGICIANS' CLUB GATHERING AT WHICH NEW TRICKS ARE PERFORMED**

On this night Miss Sophie Tucker (seen left) was the guest of honour, and herself presented a trick



walls and ceiling, they did not altogether meet with the conjurer's approval.

As it happened, Dante stayed there only a few days. The stage manager of the first theatre at which the company had been engaged proved to be a Russian dancer who had met the conjurer some years previously in America. He seemed delighted to renew the acquaintance, and insisted that Dante and his family should use a suite of rooms which was built into the theatre.

Dante was quick to take advantage of the other's kindness. The rooms were excellently furnished, and there was to be no charge for rent. But you rarely get something for nothing in this world. A few days after they had taken up residence, the flat was broken into, and Miss Dante and a young girl assistant were robbed of jewellery worth £100, to say nothing of a number of valuable dresses.

The theatre itself was spacious and well kept. The decorations were extremely artistic, and the dressing-rooms lacked nothing in the way of up-to-date accommodation.

The story of Dante's first night reception seems worth recording. The conjurer was somewhat troubled by the fact that he could not speak Russian, and consequently wondered how it would be possible for him to get his patter "over."

"Don't worry," the manager assured him. "Just talk English. Some of the better class people will understand you. In any case, I will provide an interpreter, who can explain things as the show proceeds."

Apparently magicians are a novelty in Russia. On the opening night, the interpreter made a long and rambling speech in which he assured the audience that they were about to witness tricks, *not* miracles. The tricks, he said, were performed by natural means, and were the outcome of a new and wonderful science which was not yet properly understood.

Dante's performance caused a huge sensation, and such was his success that his stay in Moscow and Leningrad was prolonged for a further twelve weeks.

The tour, however, did not end as happily as it might have done. Dante was told to present himself at the



Russian offices of the German syndicate in order to receive the money which was due to him. To his utter astonishment, he was informed that he could be allowed only one hundred American dollars for himself, and the same amount for every member of his cast. It was explained that they were short of American money at the time, but he was handed a note authorising further payment when he returned to Germany.

All the company were searched on leaving the country in order to prevent them smuggling valuables across the border. Last and not least, Dante's baggage, which should have been sent on direct, took twenty-five days to reach Berlin. This delay lost him two weeks' work, for which he was never compensated.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE HANDCUFFED CLERGYMAN—AN ESCAPE THAT WENT WRONG

ONE day early in March, 1918, an elderly clergyman called at my office, and asked to see me on important business. He was a well-dressed, pompous looking gentleman in the middle fifties, and in his hand he held a brown paper parcel tied neatly with a piece of coloured string. I remember wondering what his business could be, for I did not recollect having seen him before. However, he did not leave me long in doubt.

"I believe you are a friend of Houdini, Mr. Goldston," he said. "And in that case you must know something about handcuff escapes. I have a pair of handcuffs here, and I pride myself that I can escape from them quite as quickly as Houdini or any other professional escape artist. May I show them to you?"

Without waiting for a reply, he undid his parcel, and exposed a pair of handcuffs built on the regulation police pattern. I examined them closely. There did not appear to be any trick in them, but this I knew would not prevent him escaping providing he had the necessary ability. My curiosity was aroused and I told him I should be pleased to see a demonstration.

To this he readily agreed. I took him to the staircase landing outside my office, and fastened his hands behind him, interlocking the manacles before fixing them round the balustrade. I took this precaution in order that my visitor should have as little space as possible in which to move his wrists.

At that moment an excited ringing of the telephone bell attracted my attention. I walked through to my office and picked up the receiver. The voice of a man with whom I

was doing an important business deal answered me. He had no time to waste. Could I meet him immediately? He had a fresh idea to put before me. Perhaps I could join him at lunch at the Trocadero in five minutes. . . .

I replied that I could, and, picking up my hat, hastened out to keep the appointment. The important call banished all thoughts of the clergyman from my mind, and the subsequent meal and talk did not serve to remind me of him. An hour and a half had elapsed before my business was concluded and I was able to return to the office.

As I mounted the stairs a terrific clatter and banging greeted me. "What the dickens can that be?" I thought. "Oh heavens, it must be the padre!"

I was right.

He was still fastened to the balustrade, or rather, what was left of the balustrade. Several of the supporting rods had fallen to the floor, and others were hanging loose. The poor man's collar had burst open, and perspiration was pouring down his forehead. His feet slithered continually over the floor, and he heaved and struggled as though trying to break the hand-rail in twain.

"Hi, you! Goldston!" he screamed, as he caught sight of me. "What the blankety blank have you done with these blank handcuffs? You've fixed the blankety things!"

"Hush, sir," I returned, not a little surprised at the warmth of the other's language. "Don't forget you're a clergyman."

"And don't *you* forget I'm a human being! Set me free, — you!"

"I'm sorry," I said, unlocking the handcuffs. "I thought you could escape like Houdini. It would have taken him just two minutes."

Muttering with indignation, and picking up his hat, he fled down the stairs.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A CONJURER'S RAPID COURTSHIP

**T**HE Great Maurice, the well-known French card manipulator, is a man of an impulsive and somewhat obstinate disposition. It was these characteristics which caused him to propose to the lady who is now his wife on the first occasion that he ever saw her.

Sixteen years ago, he was walking through Leicester Square with the intention of calling on me to discuss some business affairs which he had in hand. As he was about to enter my office, he noticed a handsome limousine car that was drawn up to the kerb just outside my front door. But what attracted his attention more than the car was the extremely pretty and well-dressed girl who happened to be sitting at the wheel.

Nine men out of ten would have passed the girl by, for she appeared to be entirely wrapped in her own thoughts. But not so Maurice. He approached the car, and doffed his hat in the approved style.

"Good morning," he said.

"Er—good morning," replied the girl, not a little startled.

"It's a very nice morning," went on the conjurer, following up his advantage.

"Yes, beautiful."

"Excuse me if I say so, but you are a very nice girl."

"Am I really?"

"Yes. Perhaps you know me—my name is Maurice."

"I'm afraid I don't."

The conjurer produced a photograph and his professional card, which the girl studied with obvious interest. This attention urged Maurice to further efforts.

"Are you in the profession?" he asked.

"Yes. I am an assistant with the Great Rameses."

"That's most interesting. By the way—are you married?"

"Oh, no."

"Do you think you would care to marry me?"

"I might."

"Tell me now, yes or no."

"Very well, I will."

Maurice could hardly believe his ears, and danced with joy on the pavement. "I must tell my friend Will Goldston!" he shouted, and rushed into my office, leaving his newly found fiancée still sitting in the car.

He told me his happy news, and added that he would expect me to attend his wedding breakfast. To this I agreed, thinking the whole affair was just a mad escapade. When Maurice left my office, still extremely happy and excited, I dismissed the matter from my thoughts.

A few months later, however, he burst in on me again.

"You're coming to my wedding breakfast now, Will," he said. "You're the only one we have invited."

"I can't manage it to-day, Maurice," I told him. "I have a lot of urgent business on hand."

"But you must come. We must have just one guest, and we've selected you."

I pondered for a moment. "Where's the bride?" I asked.

"Downstairs in the car. We've only just been married. The breakfast won't take you long, and the little lady will be frightfully disappointed if you don't come."

Put to me in this light, I had no alternative but to agree, and I accompanied Maurice downstairs and offered my best wishes and congratulations to his wife.

Leaving the car by the kerb, Maurice took me by the arm, and directed his footsteps towards the Lyons teashop which stands in Green Street. There he ordered three cups of tea and a plate of Dundee cake. Taking a slice of cake from the dish, he placed it on my plate, and smiled.

"There, Will," he said, "that's our wedding breakfast. I told you it wouldn't take long!"

One afternoon, shortly after the War, I was demonstrating a few tricks to Bert Bailey, the popular Australian

actor, when the Great Maurice walked into my office. He was immediately followed by a huge, thick-set, and not very intelligent looking negro.

"Good afternoon, Maurice," I said. "Who's your friend?"

"Do you mean this fellow?" asked Maurice, jerking his head in the negro's direction. "I don't know him from Adam. He seems to be following me about."

"Good afternoon," interrupted the dusky one. "None of you gentlemen have seen me before. I'm Sam."

"I've met plenty of Sams," I returned.

"Yes, sir. I dare say you have," was the reply. "But not this one. There's only one Sam like me. I'm a side-show exhibit at circuses."

"What's your line?" I asked.

"I'm the Wild Man from Borneo. Just look at these photos." He produced a number of dilapidated prints from his pocket. "That's a picture of a girl who sometimes works with me. We look like real savages when we're made up."

I glanced through the photographs and handed them back to him.

"They're all very interesting," I remarked. "But why do you honour me with a visit?"

"I've finished with the wild man stuff. I want to buy some tricks."

"You want to become a conjurer?"

"Sure. What sort of tricks have you got?"

"There's the 'Indian Basket.' That's a good illusion."

"No. It's much too old."

"Would a box escape suit you?"

"That came out of the Ark."

For the next twenty minutes I was occupied in suggesting tricks to the negro. But everything I proposed met with the same objection; they were all too old. At last I grew desperate.

"What about a freak that is half a woman, half a dog?" I demanded.

At this the negro's eyes lit up. "What half is the woman?" he asked.

"The top half."

"It's really alive?"

"As much alive as you are."

"What is the price of this person?"

"I'll charge you three hundred and fifty pounds."

The dusky one jumped back as if I had shot him. "My goodness, mister," he said, "that's a lot of money."

"The best thing you can do," I said, trying to keep a straight face, "is to get your friends to subscribe. Form a liability company, and make yourself managing director. This freak will make your fortune."

The negro evidently thought this a good suggestion. He picked up his hat, and promised to call again in a few days when he had collected the money.

As the door closed behind him, I burst out laughing. Maurice gripped me by the arm.

"Say, I'll buy that half-woman, half-dog freak," he said excitedly. "What's your price to me?"

I looked at him in amazement. "How long have you been a conjurer, Maurice?" I asked.

"Since I was a kid in knickerbockers."

"Do you mean to tell me that you didn't realise I was pulling that fellow's leg?"

Maurice looked annoyed. "Isn't there any such person?" he demanded.

"Of course not."

"Well, I'll be. . . . If you use your brains and invent one, I can tour the world with it. There's a fortune in the idea." With that he stamped impatiently from the room.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### MULLER THE MYSTIC

**T**HIS is the sad story of Muller the Mystic.

Muller called himself a first-rate conjurer. Many people thought otherwise, myself among them. He was only a fair second-rate performer, and had met with varying success in this country some thirty years ago. Because he thought that he ought to be earning bigger money than the provincial theatre managers would pay him, he emigrated to America, and his fellow magicians in England finally lost touch with him.

Eleven years ago he walked into my office, a shabby, unkempt individual with long hair and dirty finger nails. At first I did not recognise him, but he took me warmly by the hand and introduced himself.

"I've just arrived from America," he said, helping himself without invitation to one of my best Coronas. "Got a match? Thanks. Yes, I've just come over. Tell ya what I want to do. Are ya listening?"

"Sure."

"That's right. Get hold of this properly. I wanna see my daughter. She's up in Birmingham, and I ain't set eyes on her for twenty years. I'm gonna make an impression on the gal. She'll be real proud to meet her poppa. Where can I get some suitings?"

"Some what?"

"Suitings. Clothes. I'm gonna look real smart. Ain't bad cigars these, are they?"

"Apparently not," I returned. "As for clothes, the best thing you can do is to buy some misfits. A tailor will be too expensive, but I know a shop where they can fix you up cheaply with a decent suit. Then I'd send a telegram to your daughter telling her what time you intend to arrive. She will probably be on the platform to meet you."



I gave him the name of a good second-hand clothier, and he took his leave, promising to send me a card from Birmingham. But an hour later he was back in the office. He excused his return by telling me that he wanted my opinion on his new clothes, but I have always suspected it was my cigars that were the chief attraction.

Politeness forbade me from telling the mystic what I thought of his appearance. He was attired in a pair of striped grey trousers, and a patched frock coat which fitted only where it touched. In the buttonhole was fastened a chrysanthemum of gigantic proportions. The top hat on his head was an echo of a fashion thirty years old, and, in addition, was several sizes too big. His gloves were the best part of him, but the guardsman's cane which he carried tended only to heighten the pantomime touch. To complete the picture, he had white canvas spats and a pair of brown shoes.

"Gee!" I breathed.

"Just what I think," he smiled. "Glad ya like 'em—I chose 'em myself. I've sent off the telegram. Thanks for a cigar. I'll pop in again before I go back to the States. S'long."

Two days later Muller was back in my office, dirty and dishevelled and minus his collar and tie.

"Hello," I said. "You're soon back. What's been happening to you? You seem to have lost your collar."

"Yep," he agreed. "It's half way between here and Birmingham. I felt hot, so I threw it out the window. And as for that gal of mine, she wants her ears boxed. She took one look at me and told me that if I was her poppa, she didn't want to see me any more. Seems she took exception to my clothes. I suppose I ain't cut out for an English gent, so I'm off to the States next week. Gotta cigar?"

That is how Muller the Mystic's taste in clothes lost him a daughter's love.

## CHAPTER XXX

### DILEMMA OF A PARLIAMENTARY MAGICIAN

**M**R. FREDERICK MONTAGUE, formerly Under-Secretary for Air, is a very capable conjurer. Many years ago, he was giving a performance before some working men at Mildmay Park, and it had been arranged that he should be on the stage for a quarter of an hour.

Montague, being a young man who had his way to make, was anxious to make a good impression, and accordingly took a good deal of care in the preparation of his tricks.

Among other things, he intended to show a clock which stopped at any number asked by the audience, a spirit hand which rapped on a glass panel, and a mystic ball which floated in the air. All these effects were controlled by thin pieces of cotton which were placed across the stage.

The conjurer's two tables had been placed in the wings while a double turn—a musical and acrobatic act—occupied the stage. As a sort of grand finale, one of the pair made a great flying leap into the wings. This roused great applause, and incidentally knocked over poor Montague's two tables.

Telling an assistant to carry them on to the stage, he collected his apparatus from the floor and hurried on amid the applause of the audience. Unfortunately he happened to step into the three cottons which controlled his clock, spirit hand, and the mystic ball. The cottons immediately snapped. To his horror, the hand of the clock started to whizz round at a terrifying pace, the spirit hand tapped out continually on the glass panel, and the ball ascended high into the air above the audience.

Montague swallowed hard, and decided to do his best with the rest of his illusions. But the stage hand who had

carried on his tables had unfortunately placed them wrong side to the audience. Consequently, all the conjurer's secret traps and effects were in full view.

He did not notice this, and proceeded with his programme as if nothing untoward had happened. But when he came to the climax of his trick, he was horrified to find that the table had been reversed. To make matters worse, the audience had observed his plight, and laughed unmercifully.

Little more need be said. Montague's turn lasted exactly two minutes. When he came off, the manager approached him with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Montague," he said, "your show was great. It brought the house down. But why couldn't you make it last longer?"

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE CORNELLS AND THEIR GHASTLY PUBLICITY STUNT

**S**OME artists will go to drastic lengths in order to secure publicity, but for roguery and horror the plan of the Cornells, two American thought-readers, far exceeds any other story I have heard.

When the Zomahs were touring America, their fame spread with lightning rapidity, and they became so famous that imitators experienced the greatest difficulty in obtaining engagements. The Cornells, a couple who had met with moderate success, found their bookings dropping off alarmingly.

Driven to desperation, they concocted a great publicity scheme. Fortunately for the good of the profession, and unfortunately for the couple, the plan misfired.

They had obtained an engagement in a small hall in the Chicago suburbs, and it was here that they decided to put their idea into operation. During the performance, Madame Cornell, who was sitting blindfolded in the centre of the stage, gave a piercing scream, and made as though to fall from her chair.

"What is it?" shouted Cornell, playing the part of the distracted husband with no mean ability. "What do you see?"

"Away! away!" cried the woman, motioning her partner to keep his distance. "I have seen a murder! Two youths flung themselves upon an old man and battered his face in. I can see them now. They are tying his body in a sack. Yes, they are putting weights in. Now they are on the banks of the river." Here she gave the exact location of the scene she was witnessing. "They have dropped the sack into the water, and are hastening away."

And with these last words, Madame Cornell rolled off her chair in a well-simulated faint.

Her words created great excitement amongst the audience. The performance was stopped, and several people rushed from the building to the spot she had described in her "vision." Some of them went to fetch policemen, whilst others informed the river authorities.

It was an eerie scene by the river bank. For several hours during the night the water was dragged, and nothing brought to light. In the early hours of the morning, however, a bulky sack was retrieved from the depths. The police hurriedly opened it, and the crowd gathered round with an air of suppressed excitement. But they drew away when they saw what the sack contained. It was the mutilated body of a man.

The Cornells received more publicity than they needed. It was the wrong sort of publicity. Somebody disclosed the whole despicable plan. The pair had purchased the body from a mortuary, and, having disfigured it beyond recognition, sewed it up in the sack and dropped the gruesome bundle into the river. It was a well-thought-out plan which, but for the fact that they had to take others into their confidence, might well have succeeded.

Happily for us, such people as the Cornells are few and far between in the profession.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### WISHART AND THE CORPSE

**E**VERY theatrical artist who goes on tour knows of the great difficulties to be experienced in finding suitable lodgings. My own unpleasant and discomforting experiences in this direction would fill volumes, but by far the most extraordinary story I have heard was told me by Wishart, the conjurer and entertainer.

I will set down the story just as Wishart recounted it to me. It would be difficult to imagine a more unnerving and revolting experience.

It happened in this manner. Wishart was touring the theatres of South Wales. When he came to Dowlais, he congratulated himself on his good luck, for he was able to fix up at the very first house at which he called. The landlady told him that she had no room vacant at the moment, but if he cared to call again in an hour's time, she would be pleased to show him a room that might be suitable. This arrangement suited the conjurer admirably, and leaving his bag, he went into the town to get a meal before the evening performance.

The landlady was as good as her word. When Wishart returned later, he was shown to a room which gave him every satisfaction.

On retiring for the night he found the bed both roomy and comfortable, and soon dropped off into a heavy sleep.

His slumbers were disturbed early on the following morning by a loud knocking on the door.

"Hello," he cried, somewhat annoyed at the manner in which he had been awakened. "What do you want?"

The knocking ceased. "We've come for the corpse," a voice replied.

"Corpse! What corpse?"

"The corpse in your room."

"You've made a mistake. There's no corpse in here."

"Oh, yes there is. You must let us have it."

Wishart rose from his bed and unlocked the door. "I tell you, you have made a mistake," he said angrily. "There is no corpse in here. Please go away and let me sleep."

The two men who were standing in the passage told him that it was *he* who had made the mistake.

"The corpse is beneath the bed, sir," said one of them, as an afterthought. "It was *in* the bed until you came along yesterday."

They entered the room and pulled aside the low counterpane which lay across the bed. Wishart could hardly believe his eyes, and for a few moments was too dumbfounded to speak.

*Lying on the floor was the body of an old man!* The conjurer's thoughts are best left undescribed, but I need hardly say that he never slept another wink in the house.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE TRAGEDY OF HANCO

**I**N 1903, when Houdini was startling the audiences of two continents with his amazing escapes, a new star arose in the firmament of magic. This hitherto unknown conjurer was a young man called Hanco, who did some wonderfully clever escape tricks, something in the style of Houdini himself.

Hanco always appeared on the stage in the garb of a convict—a simple but exceedingly clever piece of showmanship. He explained to his audiences that he was an ex-convict, and had learnt all his tricks while in gaol. He had been granted an early release in view of his good conduct, and had decided to make an honest living. His little speech always won the sympathy of the audience, and this, together with the cleverness of the escapes, and the prettiness and agility of Hanco's lady assistant, always ensured a good reception for the act.

One day towards the end of the year, Hanco walked into my office, and told me he was giving up his act. I was never more surprised in my life.

"Whatever for?" I asked. "There is a great future before you."

"You are wrong," Hanco replied dramatically. "I have no future."

"But where are you going?" I queried, extremely puzzled.

"The newspapers will tell you soon enough," was the curious reply. "If you would like to buy my barrel effect, you can have it for two pounds ten."

Hanco's barrel escape was the best trick in his act, and I realised that the young man was in earnest. I closed with his offer, and as he left my office he again assured me that



he wished to keep his future destination secret. That was the last time I ever saw him.

In less than a week I read in the newspapers of his suicide. He had stabbed himself to death at his lodgings in Seymour Street, Liverpool. And gradually the sordid story was revealed.

Hanco had been madly in love with his assistant, and he became insanely jealous. He sold up his act, and then, with nothing to do, moped and worried. The girl tried to console him. But Hanco was young.

"I am going to teach you the lesson of your life," he told the girl. As he spoke he picked up the carving knife from the table, and stabbed himself to the heart.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE £ S. D. OF MAGIC

**T**HERE was a time, in the not very distant past, when magic was generally regarded as the most fascinating of all entertainments, and the star exponents of it were the highest paid men of the music-hall or stage. That was before the cinema came to upset all the accepted standards of stagecraft, before the word Hollywood held any meaning. It is useless to deny that the competition of the cinema has made things infinitely more difficult in magic; and the irony of it is this—it was a magician who first toured the world with a cinema, and spread the seeds of its enormous popularity. That magician was Carl Hertz.

In the early days, of course, the cinema was only a novelty. It jumped and flickered, and nobody could take its animated lantern show with any seriousness. Besides, in those days there were some veritable giants in magic—Houdini, Lafayette, Goldin, Maskelyne and Devant. In comparison with such as these the cinema was only a suckling child.

To-day positions are reversed, and it is that suckling child which is the giant in the entertainment world. With its synchronised speech and sound and its extraordinarily fine photographic technique it has outpaced every rival. The stage has suffered; the music-hall has suffered—and with it, magic. The fabulous salaries of the magicians of other days have passed, to a large extent, to the cinema star.

Yet I regard magic as still a virile force in entertainment. It has felt the pinch of competition certainly, but there is nothing which can exactly replace it. And there are fortunes to be made from it, although not quite on the

extensive scale of twenty-five years ago. Horace Goldin, for instance, still draws an income of several thousand pounds each year from his illusions. Then, too, there is a young Birmingham man, Gus Fowler by name, who has perfected a number of beautiful illusions with clocks and watches. A few years ago he was offered an engagement in America, and such was his success that he stayed there for nearly two years. His salary was in the neighbourhood of £200 a week. To-day he is a very wealthy man.

But to return to the giants of the past. Houdini, the greatest of them all, was so poor that at one time he sold newspapers in the streets. Not until he was seventeen, when he was working as a cutter in a necktie factory, was he attracted to magic. It was Otto Maura, a magical inventor in the Bowery, New York, who first aroused Houdini's interest.

Even when he married his wife, Bessie, Houdini was penniless. He was working a "non-stop" magical act in a "dime museum." An enterprising agent saw him, paid him a fixed salary, and hired him out under contract to various music-halls. Later, when the contract had expired and Houdini had saved a small amount of capital, he performed under his own management. He specialised in escapes, but it was his blustering showmanship which marked him for success.

In Great Britain, the highest salary Houdini ever drew was £900 a week at the London Palladium. In America he had a number of engagements which brought him \$7000 a week. At his death he was reputed to be worth well over £250,000. This figure might well have been doubled but for the half a million dollars he lost in his film printing business, and the many thousands of pounds he gave to charities and friends.

It was Lafayette who set the fashion for large salaries in the magical profession. He was convinced that a good illusionist was worthy of a payment of £500 a week, and more; but his demand met with a blank refusal from theatrical managements. Lafayette proved his point by taking over the Holborn Empire, London, for two weeks, agreeing to pay all expenses connected with the theatre.



ARNOLD DL. BIERT.



When the rent and all employees had been paid he was left with a surplus of nearly £1,400. At a later date he was engaged to appear at the same theatre at £750 a week.

For all his business acumen, Lafayette's extraordinary eccentricities absorbed large sums. At his house in Torrington Square, London, he lived in the extreme of luxury. The upkeep of his dog "Beauty" cost him £20 a week, and every morning before breakfast the unfortunate mongrel was shampooed with eau-de-Cologne costing £2 10s. a bottle. But in spite of the money he wasted in this and similar extravagances, Lafayette left fortunes in both Germany and America.

Chung Ling Soo, the Scots-American, made his fortune through bluff. In his early days he was a complete failure as an ordinary magician, appearing under his real name of William E. Robinson. In America there was a genuine Chinese magician named Ching Lung Foo, and Robinson (who had failed largely on account of his inability to "patter") faithfully copied Foo's silent style of entertainment. Later, in this country, where he obtained a large degree of success, he actually challenged Foo as an impostor. Foo, for no reason at all, took fright and left the country. Thereupon Robinson (or "Soo," as he was then called) acclaimed himself the only genuine Chinese magician in the world.

Soo possessed great gifts of magical invention—and a still greater generosity. His fortune was tremendous: he told me that for more than twenty years his salary averaged more than £500 a week. I never troubled to verify this figure, but it is probably correct. Soo's pockets invariably bulged with bank-notes. On one occasion I had him count this "petty cash" for me. It amounted to just over £1,000.

Carl Hertz was most secretive concerning his money affairs. It is tolerably certain, however, that he never drew the enormous salaries commanded by such as Houdini and Soo. When Hertz was at the height of his popularity, he accepted an engagement at £175 a week as a special concession to my friendship. From this, I calculate that his usual salary was something about £200.

Hertz enjoyed a long spell of fame, and, had he been of different temperament, he would, I think, have been a millionaire. Anyhow, he left a fortune. In all probability he lost as much as £150,000 through gambling. In addition, he gave to charity many thousands of pounds. He always lived in the best style; that was necessary, he said, to ensure publicity. Carl was an excellent publicity agent—of himself. I have known him, at parties and in my magical shop, ask me through the corner of his mouth to tell all strangers of his identity. His fingers twinkled with diamonds, his pockets were stuffed with notes, and his waistcoat front was a glitter of gold. Only towards the end of his life, when his star, so long in the ascendant, began to wane, did he adopt an appearance less flamboyant.

When David Devant first attracted attention at the Egyptian Hall thirty years ago, he was a nonentity, but a remarkably clever one. His salary was £10 a week. After some years of painstaking work, he was rewarded by an offer of a junior partnership with John Nevil Maskelyne. This he accepted, and shortly afterwards set out to tour the provinces of Great Britain under Maskelyne's auspices. Business dropped considerably in his absence, and Maskelyne, quick to see the writing on the wall, conferred a full partnership on Devant, carrying with it a salary of £20 a week.

The Egyptian Hall, already well known through the partnership of Maskelyne and Cooke, grew to great fame, and although Maskelyne must be given credit for several ingenious illusions and a number of notably successful publicity stunts, the fundamental cause of success was Devant. His magical artistry was something new to British audiences, and his illusions were calculated to defy all detection. Devant, too, was a showman of great vision. He refused to be tied down permanently to his London headquarters, which was then the St. George's Hall. Again he departed on a provincial tour, and his salary rose rapidly to £700 a week. Incidentally, he was the first magician invited to appear at the Royal Command Performance.

Devant now lives in comfortable retirement, but Horace

Goldin, with whom he was so long contemporary, is still an active force in magic. Goldin, indeed, to my mind, is the greatest magician in the world to-day, and he is the best paid.

I do not know how much Goldin earns, but it is certainly a good deal in excess of £10,000 a year. For the last thirty years he has *spent* at least £6,000 a year in the building of fresh illusions. It may be recalled that Goldin was the first magician to set the fashion of a "snap" programme. Instead of presenting one illusion in half an hour, he pressed twenty or so into a space of forty-five minutes.

Goldin's illusions are astoundingly clever. So are his methods of business. Not long ago he had thirty companies touring simultaneously in America with the same programme. Each company was estimated to bring him a profit of £100 a week.

Howard Thurston, of America, has achieved success through a remarkably keen business brain. He is, of course, in the first flight of illusionists, but it is his breadth of vision, his commercial acumen, rather than an inherent aptitude for magic, which has taken him from poverty to riches. Thurston has drawn salaries only slightly less than those of Goldin, and he has invested wisely and well. He has the reputation of being "America's only millionaire magician"; and a reasonable estimate of his fortune would be between £250,000 and £300,000.

Outside magic, Thurston has a knack of commercialising novelties. One of his most successful ventures was the marketing of a gold ring to be inserted in the nostrils during sleep, thereby ensuring correct breathing. Again, he was quick to seize on the possibilities of the fashion, instituted in Hollywood, for slimness in the feminine figure. He evolved and patented a slimming diet which found great favour with the women of America.

Arnold de Biere, well known to English audiences, is a law unto himself in magical circles. He has forsaken the fashion of big illusions for a less pretentious and infinitely more difficult style of conjuring. De Biere specialises now as a "society" magician, and his success has been phenomenal. For a forty minutes' entertainment, I have



known him draw a fee of £80 from a Mayfair hostess. He has made as much as £800 in a single week. Quite recently he was paid £200 a week to appear for a short while each evening at a famous London cabaret.

His wonderful skill in sleights has earned him a considerable fortune ; and he, like Thurston, has a mind for commercial investment. He has a good deal of money invested in theatrical productions, and recently netted a profit of several thousand pounds from a patent watch and a flexible gramophone record. But not all his undertakings are as successful. He lost half a fortune in Houdini's disastrous film printing business, and the Wall Street crash of 1929 cost him dearly.

A similar victim of the American financiers was Long Tack Sam, the Chinese magician who was last seen in London in the Christmas season of 1929. None the less, Sam is a very wealthy man. Forbidden by his Chinese guardian to become a magician, he migrated as a young man to America. He was penniless, but, spurred on by an overwhelming ambition, he eventually made his mark as the finest exponent of Chinese illusions since Ching Lung Foo.

Sam, who is a genuine Chinese, has now invested most of his substantial fortune in a large number of Chinese restaurants distributed all over the world.

Two others who deserve mention in this chapter are T. Nelson Downs and Max Malini, both products of American magic. Downs started life as a booking clerk at a railway station in Iowa. He specialised in coin manipulation ; and when he eventually decided to take up magic as a career, he was so poor that he had to walk the whole distance from Iowa to New York. On his first appearance he played in a borrowed dress suit which was far too big for him ; and although he was greeted with howls of laughter, he went on to establish himself as the finest coin conjurer the world has known. When he appeared in London in the early part of this century, he signed a contract to appear for six consecutive months at the Palace Theatre. He has continued to draw enormous salaries ever since.

Malini is an incredible fellow. He has travelled all over

the world, living in the best hotels, mixing with the best people. He has no magical apparatus, no theatrical dates. He gambles and bets in thousands of dollars—and he loses heavily. It has seemed to me very often that he has no wealth at all. Yet he is never short of money.

I recall an occasion a few years ago when Max was in London. He invited me to attend an evening at the National Sporting Club, and, as usual, he betted heavily on the boxing, and lost. Now, as most Londoners are aware, the old N.S.C. headquarters was a theatre with the stage converted into part of the auditorium, and the former auditorium used to accommodate the boxing ring. Max, who was a member of the club, at once seized on these possibilities, and before the evening was finished he had arranged to hire the N.S.C. for an entire evening in the later part of the week.

I do not know how he managed to fill the place, but fill it he did, and through a long session he gave an expert exhibition of conjuring, his apparatus for the most part being borrowed from his audience. His profit from that few hours' work was no less than £1,000.

So there is still wealth to be won from magic.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### MISCELLANEOUS MAGIC

**I** HAVE given you in the foregoing pages some intimate peeps into the secrets and lives of famous illusionists. Here, to conclude, is a collection of miscellaneous magic from the repertoire of various other super-conjurers. A score of stage tricks and illusions that have baffled many audiences are explained for the first time, besides a number of pocket tricks that may be easily mastered by the painstaking amateur.

#### STAGE TRICKS

*A good Torn Corner Trick.*—This version of the ever popular torn corner card trick is extremely neat and convincing.

The performer shows an ordinary printing photograph frame and two pieces of glass. The pieces of glass are placed in the frame, which is then laid down on the top of some loose sheets of paper. A card is selected and a corner torn off. The mutilated card and the corner are wrapped in a small piece of paper and the parcel is dropped into a tumbler. The conjurer lifts the frame with a loose sheet of paper under it and places the lot on the top of the tumbler. In due course, the paper is taken from the tumbler and unfolded. Only the corner is left in the little parcel. The frame is immediately turned over and the performer shows that the card, minus the corner, is in the frame between the two glasses. The glasses are removed and he shows that the corner exactly fits into its original place.

As a matter of fact there are three glasses, and two of them are slightly smaller than the remaining one, so that either of the small ones will fall right through the frame when the performer is apparently fixing it there.

One of the small glasses has a card with a corner torn off

it stuck to it with a speck of soap or wax, and it is laid down on the loose sheets of paper on the table with a half sheet covering it. (A duplicate half sheet is required for the trick.)

The performer, who must know just where the glass is, marks the top sheet of paper with a little guide mark, so that when he puts the frame down he knows that the hidden glass will be exactly in the right position for the trick.

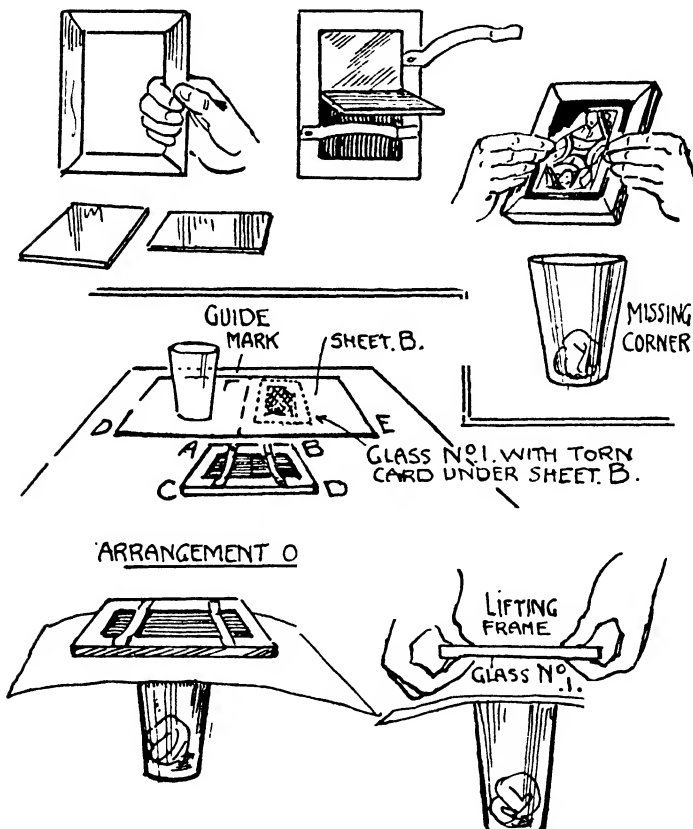
He leads off by showing the frame and the two pieces of glass, one of which, it will be remembered, is slightly smaller than the other. He then places the frame on the table and puts in the smaller glass first. This falls through on to the table; the other glass is next put in the frame and the back is fixed. (See illustration for plan of articles on the table.) The conjurer now raises the frame to show it to the audience. To do this, he holds the frame by A and B (see illustration), and draws it along the table towards the loose sheets of paper; therefore, the side of the frame C D pushes the glass on the table out of sight under the paper.

The frame is now laid on the top of the loose sheets of paper; the magician takes care to get it precisely into position by looking at the mark on the paper. A card, similar to the one which he has prepared, is forced on a member of the audience. The performer asks that the card may be marked in some way and then suggests that "this is the easiest way," as he takes the card and tears a corner from it. Of course he takes care to tear a corner which is similar to the one he is going to show later.

Having torn the corner from the card, he hands the card and the corner to the person assisting in the trick. The performer then snatches away the loose half sheet of paper (which has been covering the glass with the duplicate card attached to it) and asks the person to wrap the card and the corner in the paper. The performer looks on while this is being done, and at the same time gets possession of a little ball of paper, with the corner of the card which is stuck to the glass in the centre of the little parcel. When the assistant has wrapped the card and corner in the paper, the performer suggests that it is not a very neat parcel and,

taking it in his right hand, squeezes it and of course exchanges it for the other ball of paper, which he had prepared for the trick. (This ball can be in the side pocket of the dinner jacket or under the waistcoat until it is wanted.)

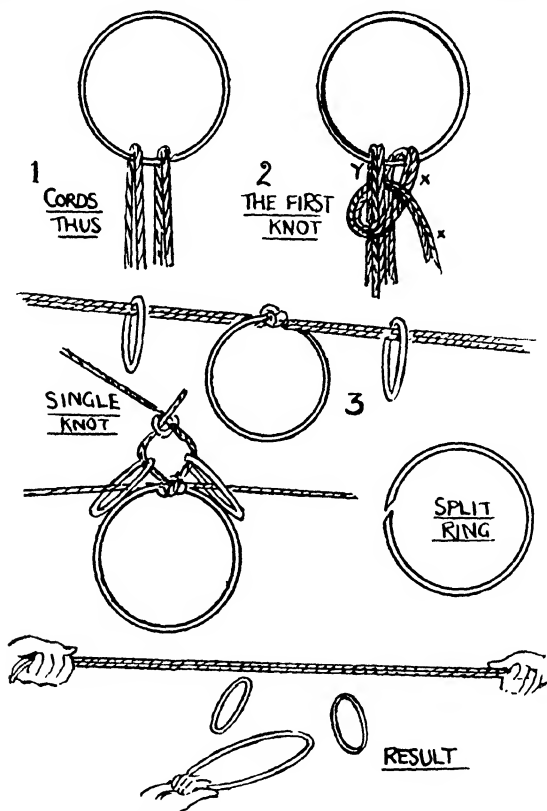
The audience know nothing of the exchange of the two paper balls, of course, and when they see the paper ball



tossed into a tumbler, they are naturally convinced that the card and the torn corner are in it. The conjurer now lifts up the frame with the top sheet of paper under it, and places the paper and the frame on the top of the tumbler; while he does this he has an opportunity of pressing the small glass well into the frame.

The trick is then practically done, so far as the illusionist

is concerned ; but he takes care, when lifting the frame from the tumbler, to put his fingers under it to prevent the glass from falling away. Having shown the card, minus the corner, in the frame, he unfastens the back of the frame and takes out the two glasses ; he secretly pushes the card off the glass (the reader will remember that it was stuck there),



and scrapes away the little piece of wax or soap which has been used. Then anyone may handle the card. The parcel is then taken from the glass and the audience see, when the paper is unfolded, that only the corner of the card is there. The performer holds the corner against the card and shows that it fits into place.

*Three Rings and Two Cords.*—The conjurer passes two long pieces of cord through a ring, as in Figure 1 ; he then

ties the two cords together, as in Figure 2. Two members of the audience are asked to hold the ends of the cords and to slip two smaller rings on them. (See Fig. 3.) The performer takes a cord from the man on his left and one from the man on his right and ties a single knot; this gathers the three rings together in the way shown in the illustration. The rings and cords seem to be securely knotted together, but in a second the conjurer pulls the largest ring away, and at the same moment the smaller rings fall down and the knots disappear.

The trick works itself. The first ring is split. If the performer ties the cords in the way described, he merely has to draw the split ring away and the rest "happens." The principle is old, but in this form the trick is new and most mystifying.

*The Superfine Coin Fake.*—All magicians know that the late Owen Clarke invented some remarkably ingenious tricks during his engagements at Maskelyne's. During one of his contracts at "England's Home of Mystery" he introduced a new version of "The Miser's Dream," which completely mystified every magician who saw it. Many illusionists approached him with the object of purchasing the method he had invented, but he refused to part with his cherished secret.

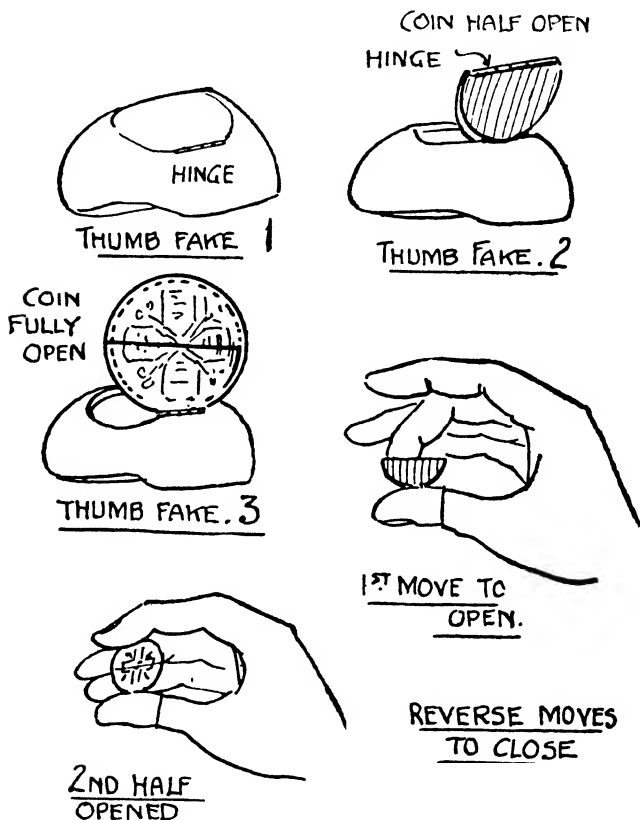
It was obvious to anyone who knew anything about magic that Owen Clarke used a fake for the production of a coin, and that the same coin was produced over and over again during the trick, but all magicians—among them some famous ones—were puzzled to know how such a fake could be made.

For some time before Owen Clarke's death he was a sick man and unable to accept engagements. One morning Arnold de Biere happened to meet Clarke in the West End of London, and remarked that he was not looking at all well. Was there anything he could do for him?

Now Owen Clarke was a great admirer of De Biere, and it did not take him long to reply to this question. He admitted that he was not at all well, and added that he had been seriously thinking of disposing of some of his secrets, including that of the coin fake he used in "The Miser's

Dream ”; he explained that he wanted it to go to some great magician who would keep it exclusively for his own performances.

De Biere immediately offered to buy the secret just to satisfy his curiosity. When the fake was delivered to him he examined it thoroughly and came to the conclusion that



although the idea of the invention was ingenious, the fake itself was far from perfect. The fake covered the whole of the right thumb, and the trick coin which was provided could not be produced, in De Biere's opinion, by any natural movement of the fingers. After many experiments, he eventually produced what he considered to be a perfect thumb fake for the production of a coin, and, thanks to my great friendship with this famous magician, he has allowed



me to disclose, for the first time, the secret of what is undoubtedly the finest coin fake that has ever been devised.

With this fake on his thumb the performer can show his hand empty, reach into the air and produce a coin. The coin is apparently placed in a hat or other receptacle and the hand shown to be empty again. Yet the production is immediately continued. The fake is extremely ingenious and yet simple in its working. De Biere himself creates a perfect illusion with it.

The diagrams have been sketched from the actual fake used by De Biere, and show how beautifully simple the idea is. The fake is, in size and shape, the "shell" of an ordinary thumb fake. It is worn on the front of the thumb and, therefore, when the back of the thumb is turned to the audience the thumb nail is seen and the fake is completely hidden. At the opening of the trick the hand is held with the fingers pointing towards the audience and the fingers well apart. The working part of the fake is on the inside of the thumb. It will be seen that there is a shallow cavity in the thumb fake to take a folded coin which is hinged to the fake. The folded coin is brought out of the cavity with a touch of the second finger; the coin swings out to the left of the thumb; then the first finger unfolds the coin in the opposite direction, and the coin is at once there, between the first finger and thumb, facing the audience.

By reversing the movements the coin is at once folded back and put into its place, and the hand again shown empty. With a very little practice anyone can become an expert coin manipulator, thanks to this clever idea. Not only does it save many weary hours of practice, but the effect it produces is infinitely better than that of the usual method, which does not permit the magician to show his hand empty before the production of each coin.

It is necessary, of course, to have the fake "made to measure," for it must grip the thumb tightly. Magicians may rest assured, therefore, that the fake is not likely to be put into general use; no maker is likely to manufacture such an accessory by the hundred, which is a great point in its favour.

*The Bank-note and Lemon Trick.*—This trick, properly performed, will make the reputation of any conjurer, for the effect is clear to all and yet mysterious.

The illusionist borrows a pound note and takes out his handkerchief. He is about to fold the note up, but pauses, and suggests that as one note is very much like another—with the exception of the number—it will be as well to make a note of the number. He reads out the number and holds the note before some member of the audience, so that everyone may be convinced that he really is reading the number of the note he is holding. This is an important detail of the trick that is sometimes overlooked.

The conjurer then folds the note into a small parcel and covers it with his handkerchief. He asks a member of the audience to hold the note by gripping the outside of the handkerchief.

A lemon is then taken from the pocket and tossed into the air a few times, so that all may see that it is what it appears to be—an ordinary lemon.

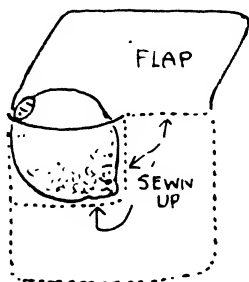
Before the audience can guess the effect which the magician is going to produce, two things happen. The performer takes one corner of the handkerchief, asks the man who is holding it to let go, and then shakes the handkerchief. The note has vanished. Immediately the performer picks up a knife, slices the lemon in half, and shows the note in the centre of it. The note is removed, wiped, and handed back to the owner, who agrees that it is the note which was borrowed from him. Anyone may look at it in order to be satisfied, from the number, that although discovered in the centre of the lemon, it is actually the note which was borrowed.

The trick should be presented briskly, because there is one point in it when the performer may not be slow. The note is first folded up and next rolled up. It will then be about the length and size of a thimble. The handkerchief used is a double one with a note stitched in the centre, and it is as well to use a real note for the purpose. In placing the note under the handkerchief, the performer “thumb palms” it in the way he would palm a thimble, and the duplicate note is held by the assistant. By “thumb palming” the note

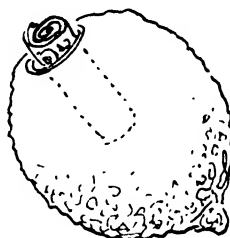
## 242 SECRETS OF FAMOUS ILLUSIONISTS

the conjurer is able to have his fingers perfectly free, and he thus does away with any suggestion of "palming." Here is where the quick movement is made.

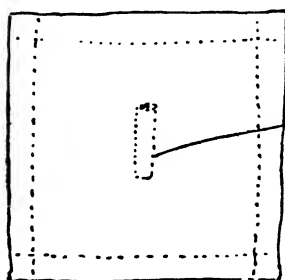
The performer puts his hand into his pocket immediately and takes out a lemon, which has been prepared for the trick by having a hole bored into one end with a pencil.



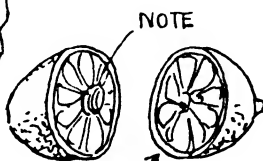
PREPARATION OF  
POCKET TO TAKE LEMON



NOTE IS PUSHED INTO  
LEMON THUS



DUPLICATE "NOTE" INSIDE  
DOUBLE HANDKERCHIEF



CUT LEMON FROM

If the pencil is moved round once or twice a deep hole can be made. The pocket—the right-hand pocket of the dinner jacket—is also prepared for the trick. The inner side of the pocket is sewn up and across—half way—leaving a small pocket just large enough to take the lemon, which is placed in the pocket with the hole upwards. The object of having the pocket thus prepared is to enable the performer

to push the note into the hole immediately his hand goes to the pocket, and without any fumbling. The lemon is taken out ; if necessary, the magician can give the note a little extra push into the lemon while he handles it for a moment. He then tosses it into the air once or twice—just to show that it is apparently an ordinary lemon, and of course he takes care to keep the hole in the lemon on his side.

He next whisks away the handkerchief and slices the lemon in half ; while he does this the unprepared end of the lemon faces the audience.

If he wishes, he can show an unprepared lemon in the first place, and then change it for the one in his pocket, but this is not really necessary.

Another way of making the trick a little “stronger” is by having the lemon in a small paper bag. The lemon is prepared in the same way, and there is a hole in the paper bag. If the reader is going to use this method he merely takes the lemon in the bag out of his pocket and places it on the table just before he whisks the handkerchief away. Then he opens the paper bag and takes out the lemon. This is a convincing way of doing the trick, for it would occur to few people to think that a paper bag can be opened at both ends. There is another little advantage with this method. The performer, in clearing his table for the next trick, can put the pieces of the lemon into the paper bag and screw it up ; thus the faked half is immediately hidden.

There is still another method of doing the trick, and although there is a risk in it, I have no doubt that it will appeal to illusionists who like daring methods. It is effective before an audience of children or a village audience, but I should hesitate to use it if I were showing the trick to a very sophisticated gathering.

In this case the performer provides himself with two notes with consecutive numbers, and the last figure on one of them should be “8” and the last figure on the other “9.” With a little red ink he can easily alter the “9” into an “8,” and he then has two notes alike !

He palms the faked note in his left hand and borrows a

note from a member of the audience. This is the weak point of the trick. If the owner of the note insists on taking the number of it at once, the performer is "done."

We will presume that this disaster has not happened. Directly the performer has borrowed the note he starts to fold it up as he returns to his table. He then asks for the assistance of a member of the audience, and while someone is coming up to help, he changes the borrowed note for the faked one. In going to his pocket for a handkerchief, he leaves the borrowed note in the pocket.

The handkerchief is a double one with a small slit in the centre of one side. In covering the note with the handkerchief the performer pushes it into the slit, and when the handkerchief is shaken out the note has vanished. Of course, when the conjurer has covered the note with the handkerchief he has nothing concealed in his hand, and he takes care to let everybody know that.

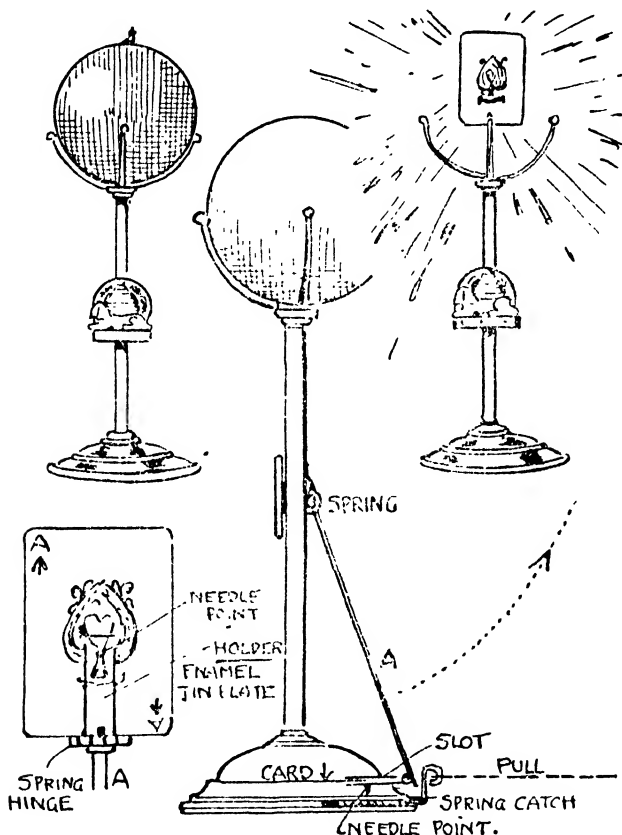
Another advantage of this method is that the lemon is apparently unprepared. It can be taken at once from the pocket and shown openly. As a matter of fact, the unprepared duplicate note is already in the lemon. To prepare the lemon, cut it in half with a sharp knife, scoop a little bit out of the centre, insert the rolled-up note, and then seccotine the two halves together. If a little dust is rubbed round the lemon the join cannot be seen.

*The Card and the Air Balloon.*—The magician shows a large air balloon and places it in a skeleton stand on his table. A member of the audience is asked to take a card from the pack and to place it in a small box ; the assistant is allowed to retain the box.

The performer draws "passes" with his wand from the box to the balloon and says "Go!" At the same moment the balloon bursts and the card appears in the frame. The assistant can open the box and satisfy himself that the card is no longer there.

The box used in this trick is the well-known Roterberg card changing box. The card is forced. A duplicate card is attached to a rod at the back of the stand ; the rod is fixed with a spring hinge at the back of an ornamental device placed about half way down the pillar of the stand.

The card is concealed in the base of the stand and is prevented from flying up by means of a pin, to which a thread is attached. To the spring clip holding the card a needle point is soldered. When the performer shouts "Go!" his assistant draws on the thread, the rod flies up, and the needle point causes the balloon to burst.



*Okito's Ducks from Nowhere.*—Soon after the presentation of "Chinese acts" by magicians the general public began to put on their "thinking-caps," and it was not long before they connected the marvellous production of all kinds of large articles and livestock with the Chinese costume worn by the magician who specialised in such tricks. Without knowing the exact methods by which such

tricks were done, audiences came to the conclusion that the illusionist who dressed himself up in a long Chinese robe certainly had plenty of room beneath that robe for the concealment of all the things he wished to produce.

Now, that explanation does not fit when the magician appears in loose Chinese trousers and a loose jacket, and



that is how the conjurer who wishes to do the following trick can be dressed. Yet, without having any cover for the things he is to produce, the performer is able to startle his audience with the production of a tub with four or five live ducks in it. When I add that the production is managed without any traps in the stage, and without the use of any piece of furniture in which the tub and the ducks might

possibly be concealed, it will be seen that the trick must be extremely baffling to any audience.

The performer merely uses a large cloth, which he throws over his shoulders. He immediately produces the little tub—a very solid “prop” it is—and, as it appears to be so heavy that he is unable to hold it, the assistant comes forward with a large tray. The tub is dropped on the tray with a resounding “thud,” and the assistant, unable to hold tray and tub together, places them on the stage. The performer whisks away the cloth and the ducks immediately make their presence known in the usual way.

That is the effect seen by the audience, and no doubt some of my readers will have guessed that the tray is not there for nothing! But that idea does not carry one far. Here is the full explanation of the mystery.

The tub is bottomless. It is fitted with a hinge so that it can be opened, and the ends have a little catch fixed to them, so that when the tub is placed round the magician's body, under his jacket, the catch on the tub can be fastened and he can move about easily without any fear of the consequences. The tub is there ready for the trick when he wishes to do it, but it does not get in his way if he prefers to lead up to the big trick by first presenting some smaller effects.

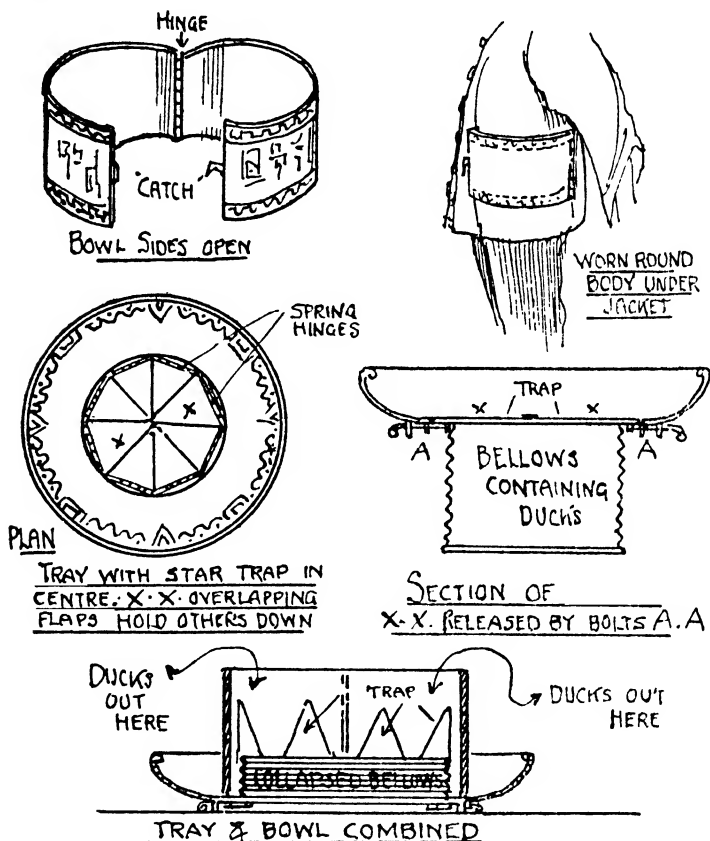
Of course, when he is presenting the trick the conjurer makes a great display with the cloth, to convince the audience that there is nothing concealed in it. He then throws it over his shoulder, and as it is a large cloth, it hides the jacket. He releases the catch on the tub and draws it clear from his body under the cloth. Immediately he does this, he fastens the catch again and holds the tub, still covered with the cloth, well away from him, so that the audience can see that there is something very substantial beneath the cloth.

The performer looks round, apparently with the object of finding some table on which he can place the thing he has produced, and he pretends that he has some difficulty in holding it. At this moment the assistant comes forward.

The assistant has been holding a large tray with the top



surface facing the audience. In response to the magician's nod, he quickly places the tray under the cloth to receive the object which the performer is holding, and the tub comes down with a loud bang on the tray. The assistant staggers under the load and swiftly places the tray on the



stage, near the footlights. The performer snatches away the cloth and the ducks step out.

The tray does the best part of the trick. The ducks are concealed in a bellows pocket under the tray. The top of the tray is fitted with a star trap which is held in position by a couple of small bolts. The hinges of the trap are fitted with springs, and therefore the trap flies open directly the bolts are drawn.

The working of the trick will now be clear. It will be remembered that when the magician produced the tub, the cloth hung down and so concealed it. Directly the tub is dropped on the tray, the assistant pulls the bolts which hold the trap in position, and the ducks begin to find their way upwards. When the tray is placed on the stage the bellows pocket naturally closes, and the ducks are there—inside the tub. Moreover, the fact that the tray is now flat on the stage does away with any suggestion that the ducks could have been concealed at the back of the tray.

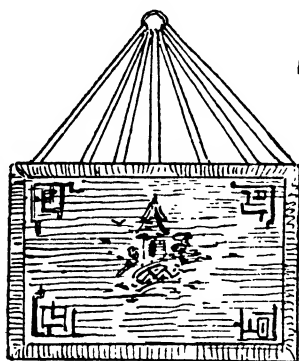
It will be seen that the trick is perfect in every detail. The tub occupies the space round the performer's waist—the best position for any load—and it is produced without an effort. A very few rehearsals will enable anyone to produce the tub in such a way that, even if the trick ended there, it would still be a good trick. The production of the ducks is a staggering climax. This part of the trick needs most careful rehearsal, but the effect achieved is worth all the hard work which the performer and his assistant may undertake to produce it. There is no better big production than this, and yet it is one that is managed easily. If reasonable care is taken it cannot fail to mystify any audience.

*The Okito Inexhaustible Mat.*—This is a fine trick for a magician who presents a Chinese act. The performer enters with a large mat in his hands. To one end of the mat a number of ribbons are sewn and the ends meet in a small ring. After he has shown the mat, the conjurer rolls it up and hangs it on a line across the stage; as the line is raised he puts a large elastic band round the rolled-up mat. When the mat is suspended in mid-air he reaches into it and produces a quantity of things—handkerchiefs, bouquets, ribbons, two ducks, a flower pot and a number of tulips which he throws on the stage; as the flowers fall they stick into the stage, which then resembles a large flower bed. Finally the performer produces a large canister full of blooms.

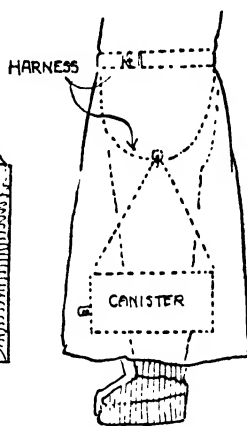
All the things produced are stowed away in the canister, which, of course, is bottomless. The illustrations show the

various compartments in the cylinder in which the different loads are packed.

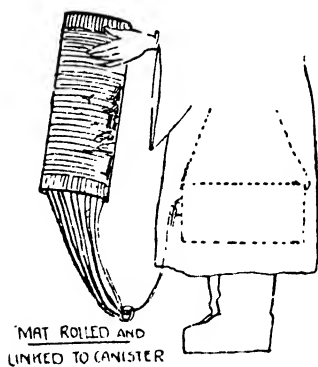
On the outside of the canister are two strong headless nails, and by means of these the load is suspended by two straps under the performer's robe. Before coming on the



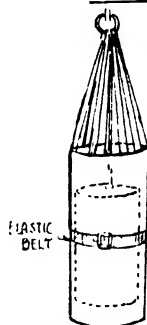
MAT AS SHOWN



CANISTER UNDER  
ROBES



MAT ROLLED AND  
LINKED TO CANISTER



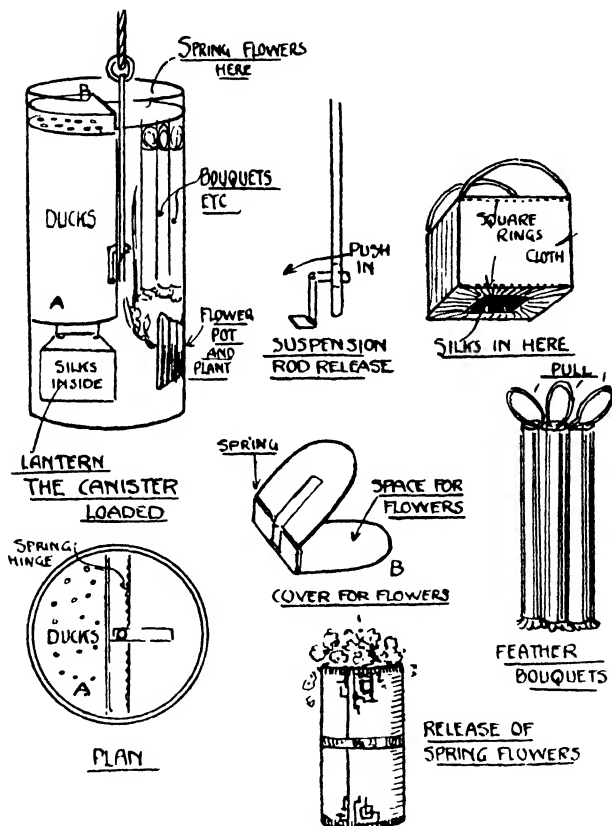
MAT HOISTED WITH  
CANISTER INSIDE

stage he fastens, by means of two snap hooks, a cord between the ring connecting the ribbons and the canister.

The magician shows the mat unrolled with the ribbons on his right. Then he reverses the position of the mat and bends down to gather up the ribbons; in this position the load comes off the headless nails and is hidden for a moment

behind the mat and at the sides by his robe. He then starts to roll up the mat and, bringing the ribbons to the top, naturally draws the load into place.

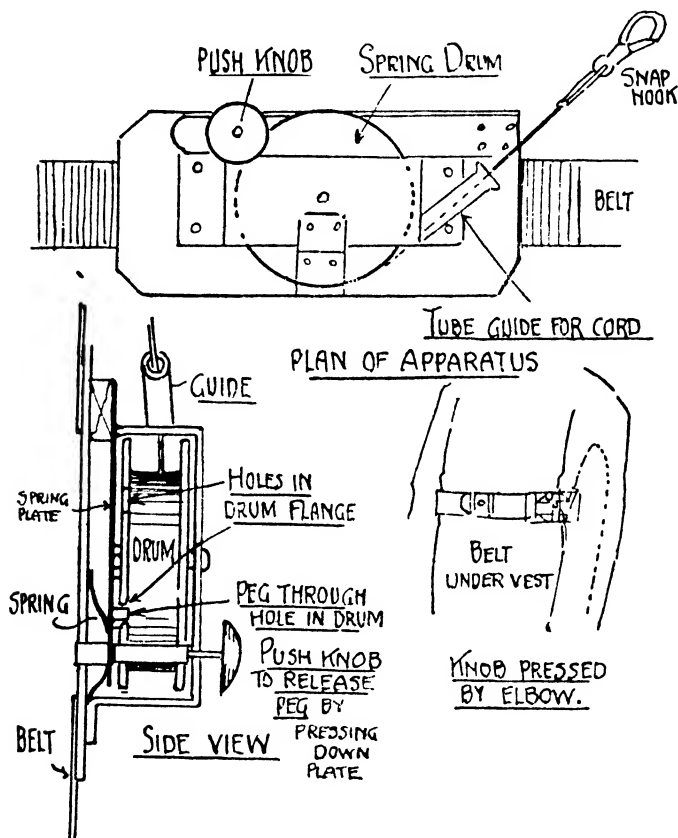
When that move has been made the performer has really done the whole of the trick ; the rest is a matter of showmanship. The details of the inside of the



canister are clearly shown in the diagrams and need no explanation.

*A Bird-cage Vanisher.*—This vanisher is worked on the familiar spring tape-measure principle, the spring being in a drum. In this case, as the vanisher has to draw the bird-cage up the sleeve of the performer, the apparatus is attached to a belt worn under the waistcoat. The cord is

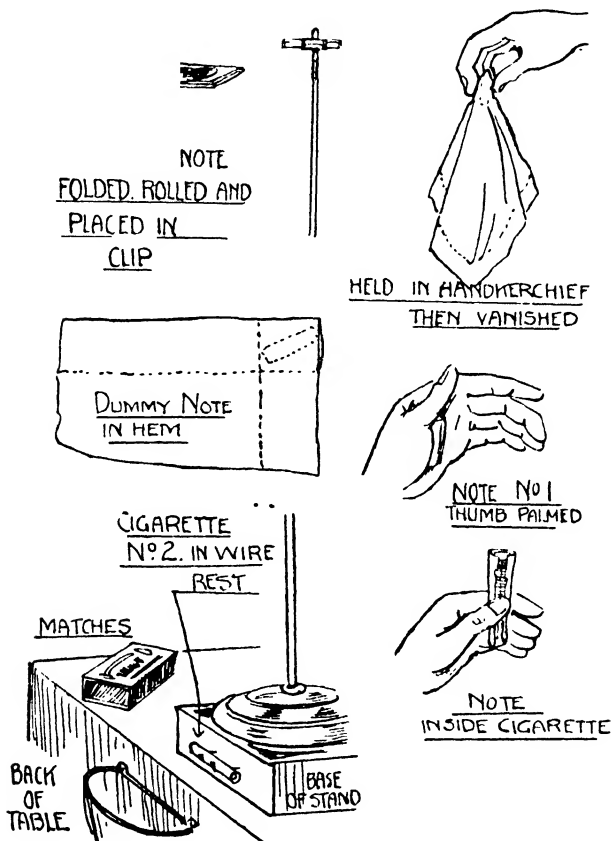
taken up under the waistcoat and down the sleeve, the length being adjusted so that when the conjurer wishes to attach the end of the cord, which is fitted with a snap hook, to the cage he can easily do so. It will be seen that



in order to vanish the cage the performer releases the spring by pressing with his elbow on a knob on the drum, which immediately rotates, drawing the cage up the sleeve.

*The Note and the Cigarette.*—Having borrowed a pound note from a member of the audience the performer folds it up, rolls it, and places it in a little clip in a stand on his table. He then displays a handkerchief and, taking the note from the clip and placing it under the handkerchief, asks a member of the audience to hold it for a few minutes.

He next asks for the loan of a cigarette, which he assures the lender will not be returned. Having lit the cigarette, the performer takes one corner of the handkerchief, which is still being held by his volunteer assistant, and gives it a shake. The note has disappeared. Breaking open the cigarette which he has been trying to smoke, the magician



discloses the note and takes it down to the owner, who identifies it as the note he originally lent.

The first part of the trick is "fair"; the borrowed note is put into the clip and is afterwards held under the handkerchief. When the performer hands the note, covered by the handkerchief, to a member of the audience, he "thumb palms" the borrowed note. The man who takes the

handkerchief believes he holds the note, because a dummy note has been sewn into the hem of the handkerchief.

Having borrowed a cigarette, the conjurer puts his hand into his pocket to get a match, but finds he is without one ; he goes to his table for a match. In putting his hand into his pocket he dropped the borrowed note into the pocket and left it there. He has so arranged matters that he has to pass behind the table to reach his box of matches, and this gives him the opportunity to exchange the borrowed cigarette for one specially prepared. This cigarette is on a little wire rest behind the stand on the table (see illustration), and has another note rolled up in it and a little tobacco at each end. After lighting the cigarette the performer puts the box of matches into his pocket and in doing so gets hold of the borrowed note again. The handkerchief is then whisked away and the cigarette broken, showing a note. The performer spreads the note out, and then folding it, goes to the owner and asks him to identify it as his note ; of course, in doing this the conjurer exchanges the note which was in the cigarette for the borrowed one in his hand.

*A Quick Change.*—The performer shows two envelopes, one with a penny red stamp on it and the other with a halfpenny green stamp. Into the first envelope he places a small green handkerchief and into the other a red handkerchief ; the envelopes are then placed against a stand on the table. The conjurer commands the two handkerchiefs to change places and, opening the envelopes, shows that his wish has been obeyed ; the envelope with the red stamp now contains the red handkerchief and the other envelope the green one.

The beauty of this little trick is that the performer has nothing to “get away with,” and that the working is perfectly simple.

The whole secret is in the stamps ; the envelopes are unprepared.

Take a red and a green stamp and fold them in half with the gummed side outwards ; now stick the upper halves together. If the two lower halves of the stamps are now fastened down on an envelope the upper two stand up in

the centre, and act as a little flap, which can be moved either to the top or bottom of the stamp. When it is folded upwards the audience see that the stamp is apparently an ordinary stamp ; when the flap is brought downwards the colour of the stamp has been changed. In order that the flap may be held down in either position two little dabs of wax are placed on the top and bottom of the stamp on the envelope.

To bring about the transposition of the two handkerchiefs the performer merely has to change the position of the two flaps on the stamps—a simple matter. This subtle idea was presented to me by the noted magician Karson.

*The Karson Torn and Restored Newspaper.*—Not only does this version of the ever popular “ torn and restored paper ” permit of the performer showing his hands really empty both before and after the trick, but the newspaper can be examined by the audience before the performance and immediately afterwards.

It is advisable to have the paper folded into creases before the performance to facilitate tearing in fairly equal pieces.

The magician shakes out the paper and shows both hands empty. He tears the paper into two, then into four pieces, and continues until he has a bunch of small pieces in his hands. Without any false moves he takes a corner of (apparently) one of the pieces and gives it a shake, when the whole sheet unfolds, the pieces being joined together again.

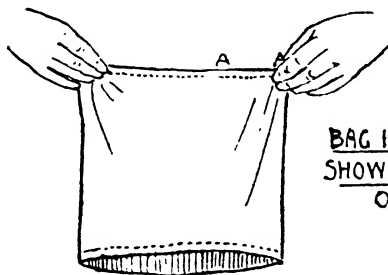
There is, of course, an extra sheet ; this is folded up into a small neat parcel and placed in the waistcoat pocket. When the performer is displaying the sheet of paper to the audience he has ample cover for the move he wishes to make ; he quietly gets the extra sheet out of his pocket with his finger and thumb and holds it behind the other sheet when he tears it up. To pocket the pieces when the “ restored ” sheet is being shown is an equally simple matter.

*The Albin Egg Bag.*—The egg bag I am about to explain is, in my opinion, the best of all. The late Albin, the man who made the egg bag famous, told me that he divulged

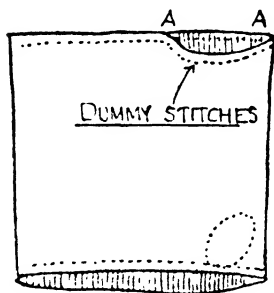


his secret to Horace Goldin, De Biere, and myself only. I am sure that every reader will appreciate the great advantage to be gained by using the bag which I now describe.

The illusionist begins by holding the bag upside down. He turns it round slowly and everyone has a good view of both sides of the bag. He then turns it inside out and



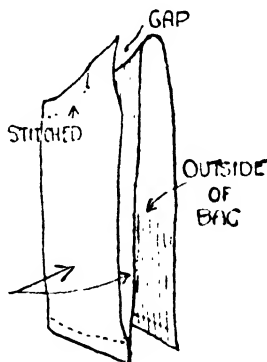
BAG INSIDE OUT  
SHOWING ABSENCE  
OF POCKET



GAP AT A — A  
IS ENTRY INTO  
DOUBLE BAG

SECRET OF INSIDE  
OF BAG

DOUBLE THIS SIDE



again shows both sides. He is now ready for the performance. What is more, when the egg is hidden in the bag, the conjurer can allow any member of the audience to feel inside the bag without running the slightest risk of giving the secret away.

The secret is partly in the way in which the bag is made and partly in the manner in which it is manipulated.

One side of the bag is double and the extra side is carried

down to the bottom of the bag ; it is sewn down right across the bag with the exception of a couple of inches in one corner, where there is room for the egg to pass through. But this is not all. The performer begins by having the bag inside out, and as he holds the two corners he pulls on them, thus making the bottom of the bag taut and closing up the pocket. The pocket has a false hem along it, in line with the stitching at the bottom of the bag ; the false hem is on both sides and so the bag can be shown slowly ; the audience can inspect both sides !

The bag is then turned inside out. When the performer is working the trick in the usual way he naturally has the double side of the bag next to him. He can then ask someone to feel inside the bag without the slightest risk of the pocket being discovered.

By having the opening of the pocket as small as possible, he is also able to keep the egg entirely under his control ; at any moment during the working of the trick he can find the egg immediately, without any fumbling. Yet, when he wishes to show that the egg has vanished, he can turn the bag inside out without running the risk of people seeing the opening of the pocket.

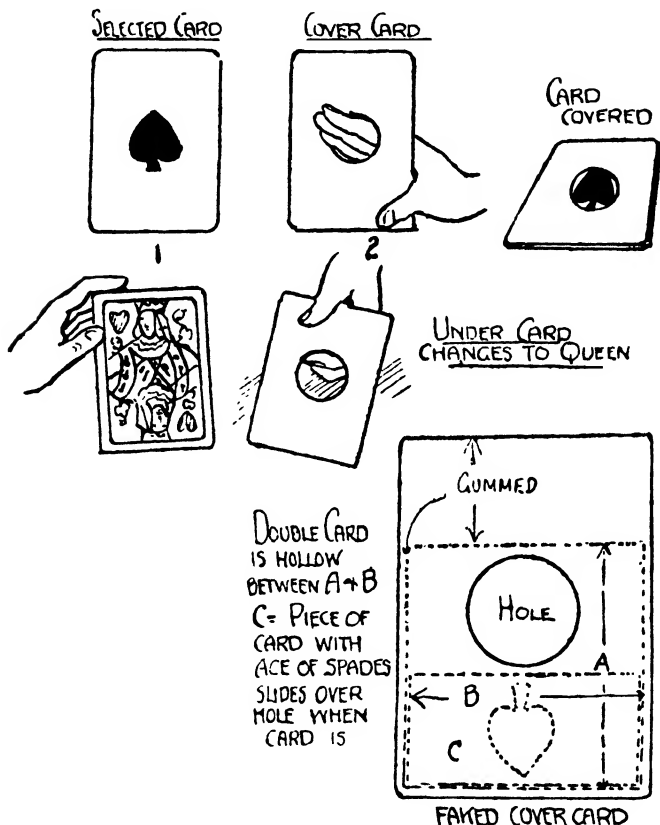
The bag should be made in fairly substantial flannel or fine serge, neither too thick nor too thin. One rehearsal of the trick with a bag used and made in the way I have described will convince the reader that at last he has the " real thing."

*The Changing Ace.*—The performer asks someone to take a card from the pack. He says that it does not matter which one is selected because he is going to ask the chooser what card he takes ; as a matter of fact, however, the conjurer forces the Ace of spades on his victim. The card is held up, face to the audience, for a moment, so that all may see it ; the performer then tosses the card on the table, face downwards, and in doing this changes it by means of the " top change " for the Queen of hearts.

He then shows a card with a small round hole cut out of the centre and explains that he is going to use this card to hide the Ace of spades (really the Queen of hearts) for a moment. He picks up the card on the table, places the

"hole card" over it, and turns it with its face to the audience, who apparently see part of the Ace of spades in the centre.

Turning the two cards round, so that the back of the supposed Ace of spades is facing the audience, the performer waits for a moment and then quietly turns this

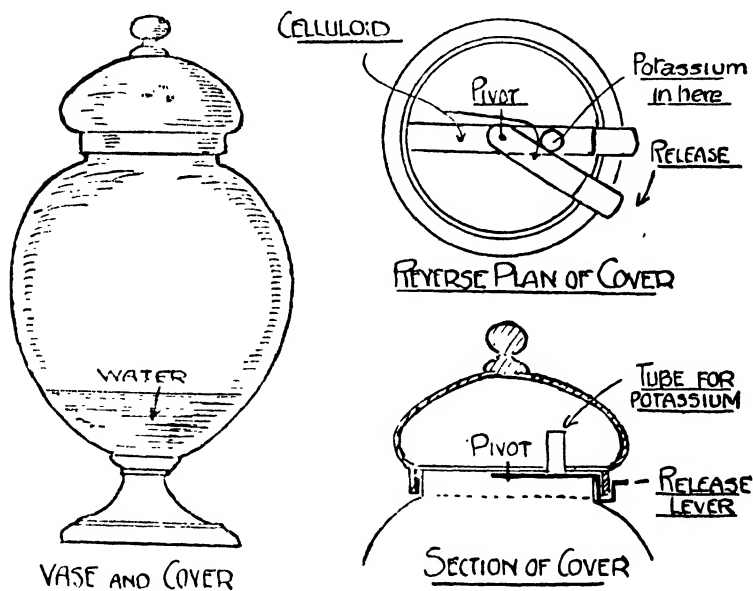


card to the audience, when everyone will be surprised to see that the Ace of spades has been changed "under their eyes" to the Queen of hearts. The card with the hole in it is held up and shown to be free from any preparation—just a card with a hole in the centre.

The change is brought about in this way. The card with the hole in it is really a double card, formed by gumming

two cards together in the way shown in the illustration. Part of the double card is hollow, and a small piece of card with an Ace of spades in the centre is placed inside the hollow portion. This little piece slides down when the Queen is being covered and so the audience are led to believe that they are still looking at the Ace of spades ; by merely reversing the two cards the little piece slides back again and the card with the hole in it then appears to be unprepared.

*A New Smoke Vase.*—The secret of the old smoke vase is

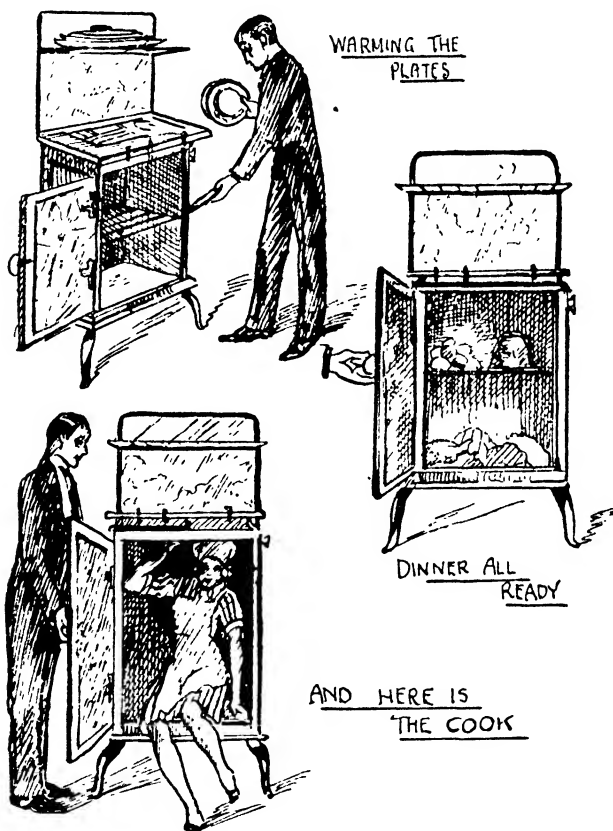


known to many schoolboys ; here is a vase which will keep them guessing, because the little secret is well hidden.

The performer holds up a little vase with a lid. The vase is empty ; the performer takes off the lid, replaces it, and throws a handkerchief over the vase. He lights a cigarette and puffs the smoke in the direction of the vase ; finally he takes the handkerchief away and shows that the glass is full of smoke. The lid is removed and the smoke escapes.

There is a little water at the bottom of the vase, but this is easily hidden by the hand. Across the bottom of the lid is a small strip of celluloid with a hole in it ; into this hole

fits a tiny tube of potassium, which is prevented from falling through the hole by another bit of celluloid attached by a pivot to the centre of the strip, and this little piece projects through the lid. Having shown the vase and covered it, the performer merely has to swing the small piece of celluloid on one side; the potassium falls into the

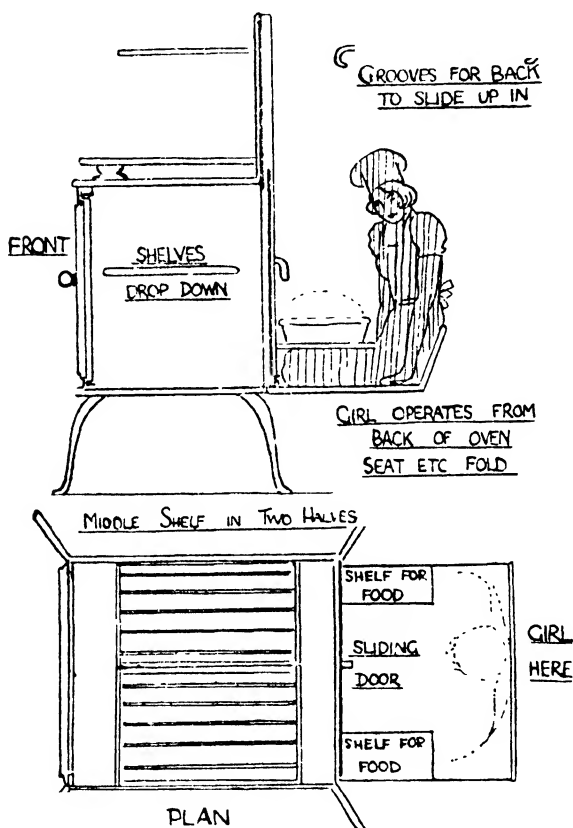


water and the smoke is "made." For this secret I am indebted to Capt. L. C. Nicoll.

### STAGE ILLUSIONS

*The Oven Illusion.*—Here is an illusion which will appeal to a magician who is looking out for a novelty.

In the centre of the stage is a substantial oven under which the audience have a clear view. The illusionist calls attention to the fact that the oven is empty and puts in a few plates and dishes. He closes the doors for a moment. Opening them again he shows that the dishes have been filled with all the various things required for a dinner, and

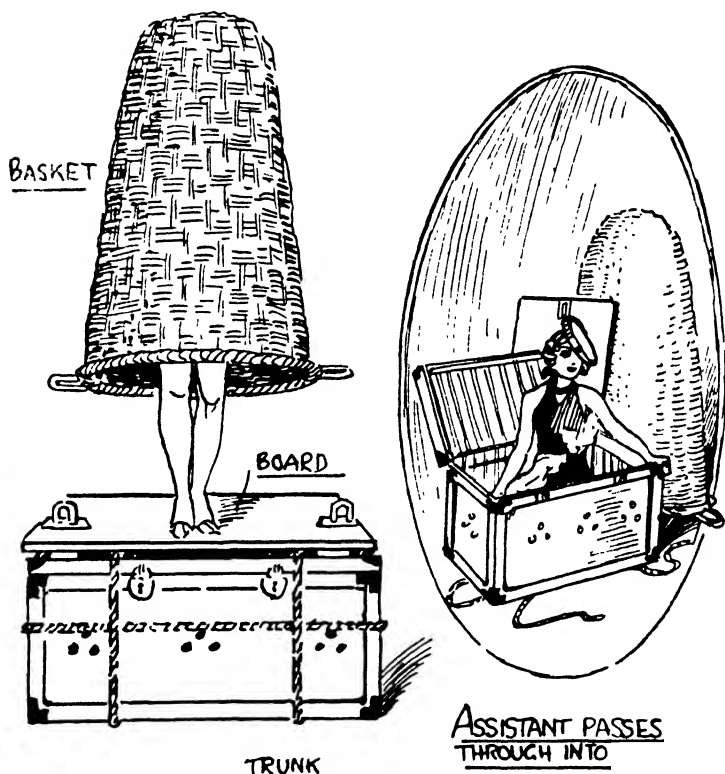


they are removed to a table. The doors of the oven are closed again and opened, revealing the cook, who promptly steps outside.

The illusion is self-contained, and a glance at the illustrations will show its working. The dinner and the cook are concealed behind the oven, the back of which is really a door which slides upwards. The illustrations show plainly

how the dinner is put into the oven. The middle shelf of the oven is really divided in two, to enable the girl to get inside at the conclusion of the illusion. The whole thing is simplicity itself, but quite effective.

*Out and In.*—One point in favour of this illusion is that the apparatus used can be thoroughly examined by a

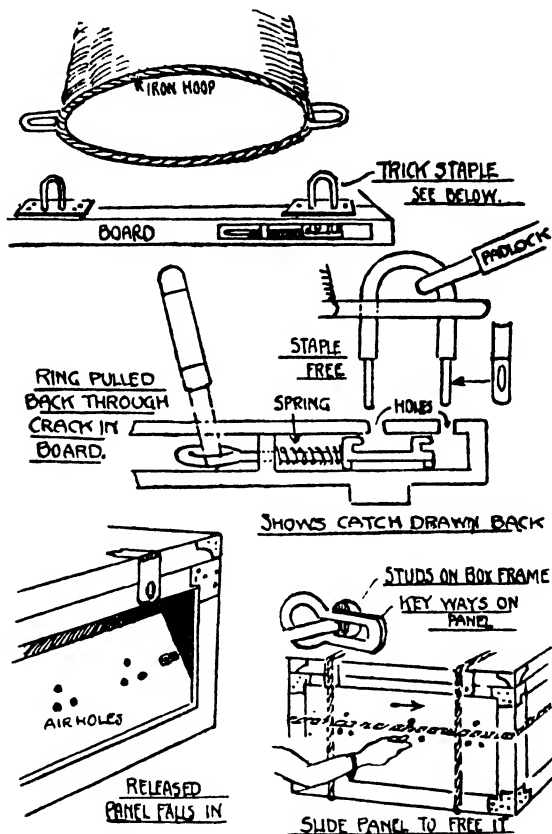


committee from the audience. Another great advantage is that the committee, having examined the things to be used in the performance, can remain on the stage during the progress of the illusion.

The first thing to be examined is a heavy box, which is obviously particularly strong. The front is fitted with hasps and staples, and, after the committee have thoroughly examined the box, it is securely fastened with padlocks, the

keys of which the committee may retain during the performance.

The next thing to be examined is a heavy board, about as wide as the lid of the box, but not quite so long. This board is fitted with a stout staple at each end. Lastly, the committee are asked to look at a large conical-shaped



basket, with a metal hoop fitted to its base. This hoop also is heavy; at two points there are large staples, which are so placed that when the basket is placed on the board the staples on the basket fit over the staples on the board. Thus the basket can be padlocked to the board.

When the committee are thoroughly satisfied that all is “fair, square, and above board”—there is room here for a



little joke from the performer, as he calls attention to the board—they are asked to lock the box and tie a rope round it in any way they please. The board is then placed on the top of the box. An assistant takes her stand on the board and the basket is lowered over her. The basket is padlocked to the board and the keys are given to the committee.

Screens are next placed round the box, and in a short time, when the screens are removed, the committee are again asked to examine the basket and the box. They admit that the knots on the ropes, which can be sealed if necessary, have not been tampered with, and that the locks are still secure. Yet, when the padlocks are unlocked the basket is empty, and the assistant is found inside the locked box.

There is no trick in the basket, which is exactly as it is described. The board is fitted with a faked staple, the working of which is clearly shown in the diagram. The board itself is really made from two boards joined together, but there is a very small space between them. Into this crack the assistant inserts a piece of thin steel in a wooden handle. Knowing just where to use this little tool, she inserts it in the ring of a spring bolt which holds the staple in place. The assistant pulls back the bolt and thus releases the staple ; she then gets out and closes the basket down again by merely pushing the staple back into place. The staple has rounded ends which admit of its being so fastened; the spring gives and then locks the staple in place.

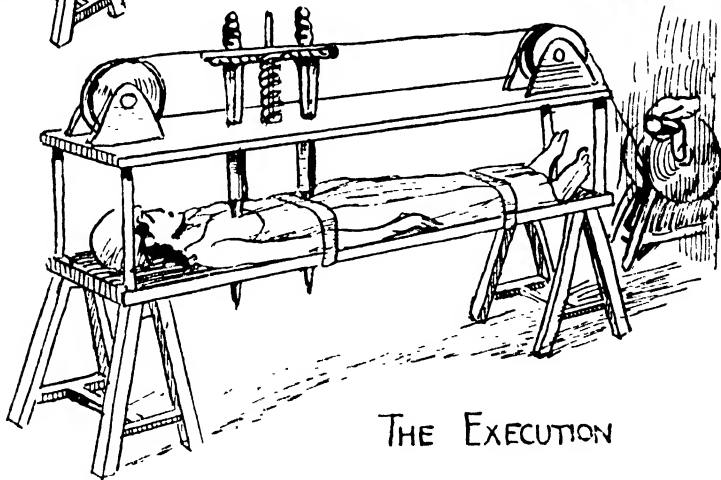
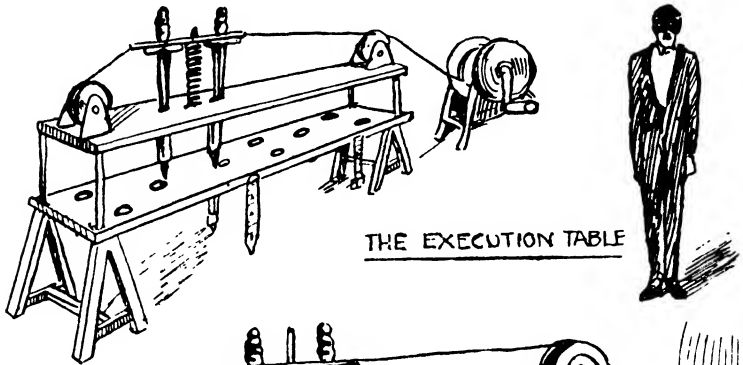
Obviously it is not necessary to have both the staples faked.

The box is not quite so innocent as it seems. It is composed of a strong framework of battens connected by boards, and all the boards—front, back, and sides—are made to slide. The performer, when showing the box, tells the committee that the holes in it are there to admit air. That is true, but they are also there for another purpose. The assistant, armed with a thin iron rod, inserts it in a hole and moves any board.

On the inner side of the battens are iron plates, each fitted with a stud, and each stud passes through a hole in a plate attached to one of the boards. The studs and holes

work in a "key way" (shown in the diagram). The boards are securely locked when the box is shown to the audience, but when any board is moved to one side the stud passes through to the hole in the plate of the board and allows the board to fall down.

The object of having the boards at the front, back, and



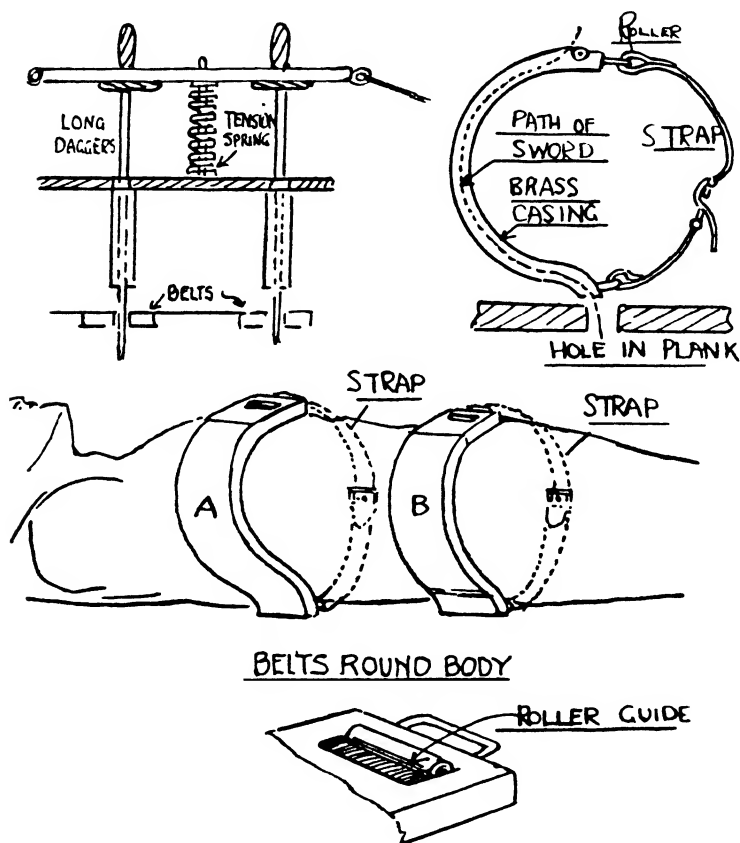
ends made in this way is to enable the assistant to get into the box at any convenient place. As the committee have the option of roping up the box in any way they choose, they might make it difficult for the assistant to get into the box if there were only one sliding board.

The simplest way to understand the working of the box is to glance at the illustration. The screws in the lower parts of the battens are, of course, dummies ; they do not

hold the boards in place ; if they did it would be impossible to slide the boards.

Having got inside the box the assistant can easily slide the boards into position again.

*The Execution.*—In this sensational illusion a woman, strapped to a board, appears to be stabbed with two

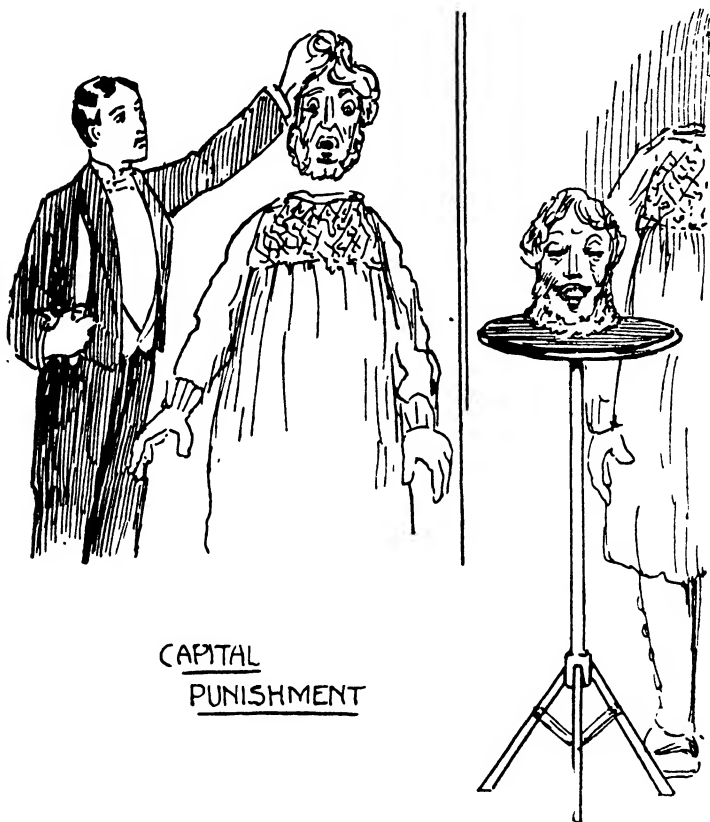


swords ; the audience see the swords enter the body and—apparently—pass right through it.

The illustrations show the appearance of the apparatus used ; the whole thing is built up for effect ; the performer could do the trick just as well if the lady were standing up.

The secret is given away in the second set of diagrams. The blades of the swords are very thin and pliable. Under

her dress the lady wears two belts, each of which is made up of a piece of hollow brass tubing, bent into a semi-circle, and a strap to keep the brass tubing in place. The swords go into the brass case and out the other end, but to the audience the blades appear to go right through the woman's body. The illusion is perfect. At the conclusion of the



CAPITAL  
PUNISHMENT

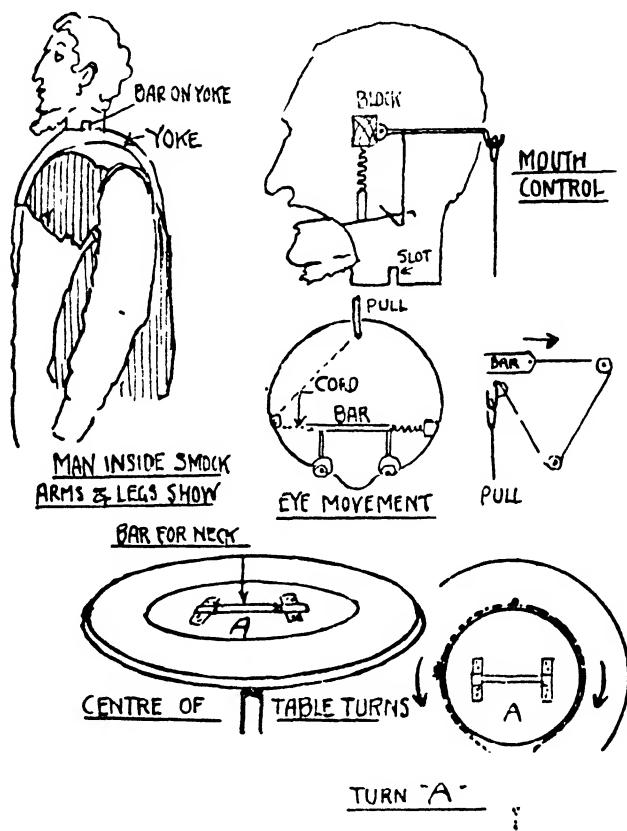
trick the swords can be withdrawn quickly, and the lady, released from her bands, is seen to be none the worse for having been "executed."

*Capital Punishment.*—The effect of this trick is somewhat gruesome, but the public to-day are rather fond of thrills.

The performer apparently cuts off a man's head and places it on a small table. The head moves from side to side, the lips move, the eyes move, and the head speaks.

Finally, the head protests that it wants to go back where it came from, and the performer kindly replaces it on the headless trunk which then walks off the stage.

The assistant on whom the operation is to be performed is dressed in a smock frock, with a red and white handkerchief tied round his neck. The illustration shows the



assistant with bent head inside the smock. Above the head is a yoke with a bar on the top; a slot in the neck of the false head keeps it in position. The sleeves of the smock are padded, but the hands of the assistant show because they are passed through slits just behind the cuffs; without this arrangement the arms would appear to be too low down the figure.

The magician poses as a doctor who can cure all ills. The assistant comes in to be cured of a bad headache, and the performer suggests that the best way to cure a headache is to remove the head. He throws a cloth over the head and, pretending to cut across the neck, lifts the head clear from the trunk and places it on a small table.

The centre of this table turns. The head is placed over a metal bar fitted into the table, and is thus held rigid. Two threads on the movable centre of the table enable an assistant to move the table—and therefore the head—to the left or right.

The movements of the mouth and eyes are also controlled by threads. The construction of the head is shown in the accompanying diagram. It will be seen that a small bar, with the end bent into a hook, projects from the back of the head. In placing the head on the table, the performer secretly slips a ring on the end of a thread over the hook and so makes the connection. The two eyes are attached to a bar which works against a spiral spring at the side of the head; thus a pull on the string or thread causes the eyes to move and the spring sends them back to their original position.

To conclude the trick the performer merely has to disconnect the threads, lift off the head, and replace it on the trunk.

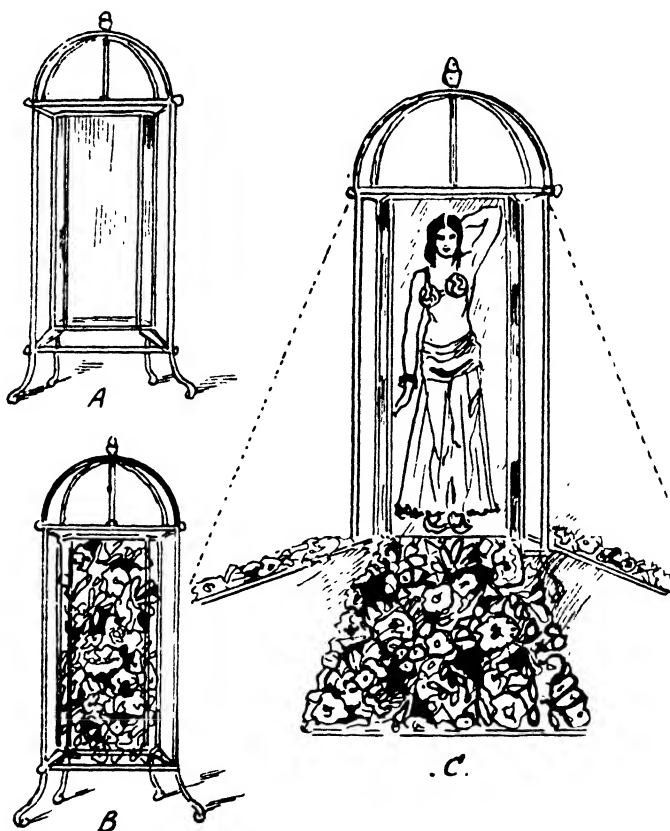
The trick lends itself to a good deal of gruesome humour in the dialogue.

*"Say it with Flowers."*—It would be difficult to find a prettier or more effective illusion than this; moreover, it is as puzzling as it is pretty.

The performer first calls attention to a large glass case which is suspended in the centre of a metal stand. (See Fig. A.) The stand is in the centre of the stage, and there is obviously no way in which anything can be placed in the case without the audience seeing how it is put there. But the magician is out to do the impossible. He tells the audience that the illusion was suggested to him by hearing the popular injunction to "say it with flowers."

Hardly have the words been said before the case is immediately filled with flowers! To be strictly truthful,

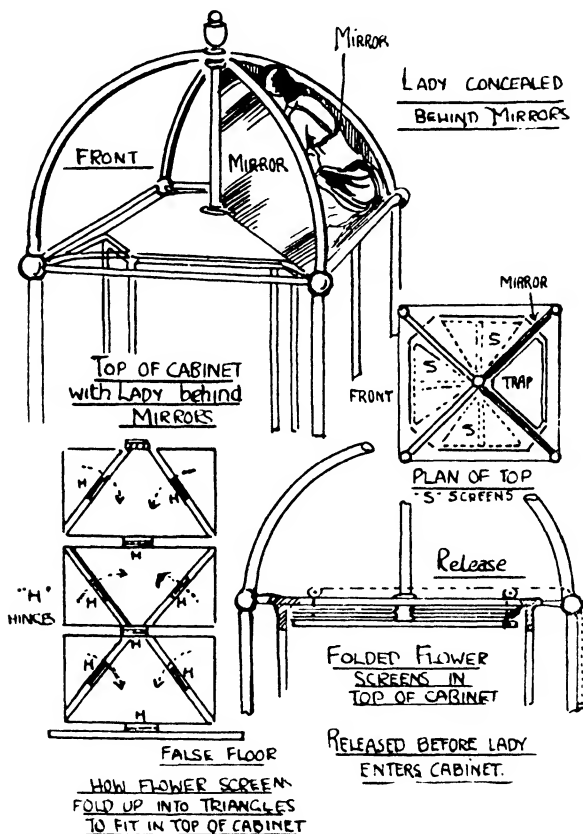
this is only the effect produced. The "flowers" are really decorated blinds which fall down the front and sides of the case. Before the audience have recovered from their surprise, the sides and front of the case are opened, and the performer hands out his assistant—the lady who asked him to "say it with flowers."



The two effects are shown in Figures B and C. If the reader will turn to the other illustrations he will see in a moment how the effects are produced. The lady is hidden in the framework at the top of the case by means of the V-shaped mirrors principle; the audience believe that they see right through the framework to the back-cloth, but they are really looking at the reflection of the side

curtains in the mirrors ; therefore the back-cloth and the curtains must be of the same material.

The three flower curtains, or screens, fold up into triangular shape, so that they can be hidden at the top of the frame. The illustrations show how the screens fold and the plan of the top of the frame shows them concealed ;



they are released by a thread carried through the back-cloth to an assistant. The screens are connected with a weighted false floor which brings them down quickly and holds them out taut.

Directly the screens have fallen, the lady, who is crouching on a plank between the two mirrors, releases the trap, which is fitted with a spring hinge, and descends into the



case ; the trap, of course, closes after her, and the appearance of the case is the same as before.

The front of the case and the sides can be opened at the same time by cords passed out to an assistant, or the lady herself can release a catch which holds sides and front in position.

This is a thoroughly practical illusion, and, as it can be worked without any trap in the stage, it should become popular with magicians who work in cinemas, the stages of which are not always fitted with all the little gadgets that illusionists so often find indispensable.

### POCKET TRICKS

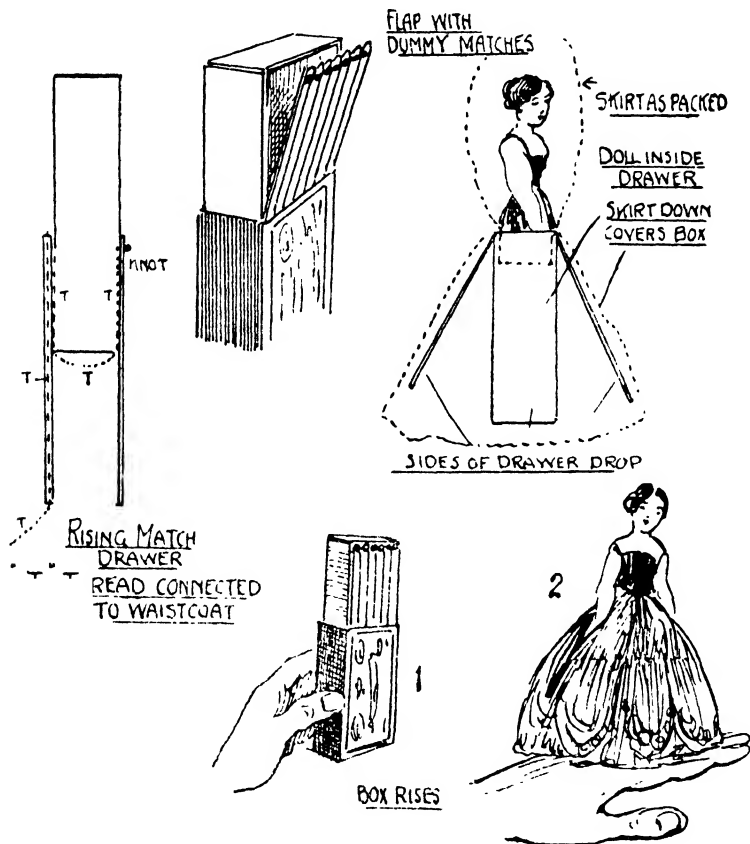
*Demain's Rising Box.*—At a recent meeting at the Magicians' Club, Demain, one of the world's greatest sleight of hand magicians, was giving a demonstration of his skill to a number of student members of the club. After a time he said that he would show his keen and attentive audience his own improvement of the trick in which the drawer of a box of matches placed on the hand rises and falls at the word of command. Demain thought the students would like the little novelty, and his audience were eagerly attentive, for the trick is very popular with drawing-room performers.

Demain placed a box of matches on the back of his hand and the drawer duly rose from the outer case. Members who had seen the trick before at the club thought the performance of it excellent ; spectators unfamiliar with it were enchanted. A slight pause ensued. Demain smiled. Everyone thought that the trick was over. Then Demain gave his hand a little shake and the box was immediately transformed into a pretty little girl doll clad in a long silk dress. Instantly, of course, everyone was eager to see where the little doll had come from and how she had made her appearance.

The accompanying illustrations were made from the model that Demain used, and therefore readers may be sure that they are correct in every detail.

The rising of the box is easily managed. Make a hole in the outer case, about half an inch from the end ; make

another hole in a line with it on the other side of the case. Thread goes through the holes and a knot at one end holds it securely. Now, if the free end has a little pin tied to it, and the drawer is inserted carrying the thread down with it, the performer is ready for the trick ; all he has to do is to stick the pin in his waistcoat. As the hand is moved



away the thread tightens and carries the drawer upwards ; if the drawer fits tightly the box can be held in the hand ; the trick is equally effective when done in that way.

On the outside of the bottom of the drawer a few matches are glued, so that when that side of the drawer faces the audience the drawer appears to be full of matches. The last half-inch of the drawer is really a little block of wood to

which the sides and bottom of the drawer are hinged. Therefore, when the drawer is made to come nearly out of the case the performer has only to shake it and the bottom of the drawer and the sides fall away, and the doll, wearing a long dress with a few small weights in the skirt, appears (the doll is, of course, in the drawer in the first place, as you will have taken for granted). The doll's dress completely hides the drawer, and the trick is finished.

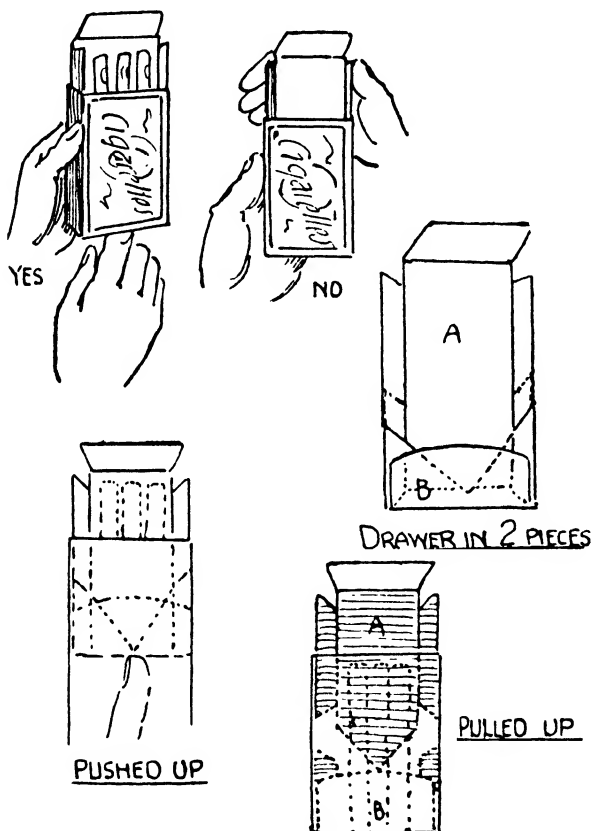
*Guess Again!*—I find that the most difficult tricks to invent are pocket tricks. This must be generally true, because good pocket tricks are extremely scarce. The reason possibly is that when a magician settles down to think hard he naturally tries to evolve tricks which will be useful to him in a show, and pocket tricks are not of that kind. Even a drawing-room audience would not consider that they were being treated quite fairly if the magician who was engaged to entertain them tried to do so by showing them a few pocket tricks. Yet some pocket tricks are remarkably ingenious, and their performance calls for a good deal of skill.

Here is a new and original pocket trick which is easy ; when I add that it is also most effective and that it costs nothing, you will agree, I am sure, that it must be a good trick. It is.

The performer holds a packet of cigarettes shoulder high in his right hand and pushes up the drawer for an inch or two. He asks someone to guess how many cigarettes there are in the case, and he quickly closes the drawer again in order not to give anyone more than the briefest possible glance at the cigarettes. Some people will guess "three," others will perhaps guess "four" or "five." The conjurer quietly pulls the drawer open again and shows that the case is empty ! He then closes it and puts it in his pocket ; if anyone wishes to examine it, he takes it out again and gives it out for inspection.

To prepare for the trick, cut off about one-third of the drawer of a packet of cigarettes ; taper the other piece of the drawer with a pair of scissors. Push the one-third into the outer case and put the other piece on the top of it ; then put in three or four cigarettes. Now, when the drawer

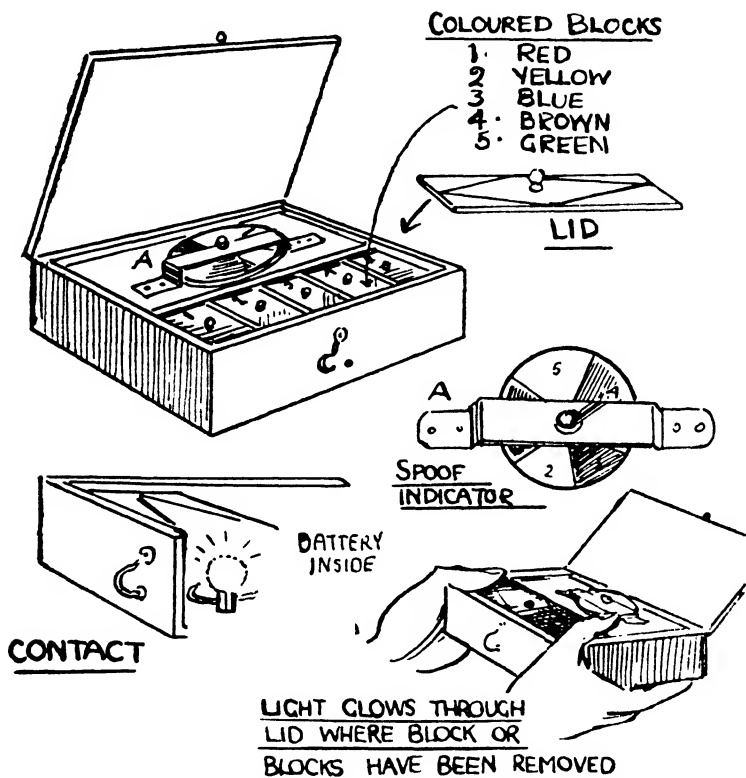
is pushed up from the bottom, the cigarettes naturally appear, because the large piece of the drawer is pushed upwards. When the performer closes the drawer he remembers to leave the flap outside the case. Then, to show the case empty, all he has to do is to pull up the top



piece of the drawer by means of the flap. The cigarettes remain hidden and the drawer is apparently empty.

On paper this may not seem to be a good trick, but I can assure the reader that in practice it is a most mystifying little puzzle. Of course, the conjurer has an unprepared case of cigarettes in his pocket, and if anyone asks to see the case with which the trick was performed it is the unprepared one which is produced for inspection.

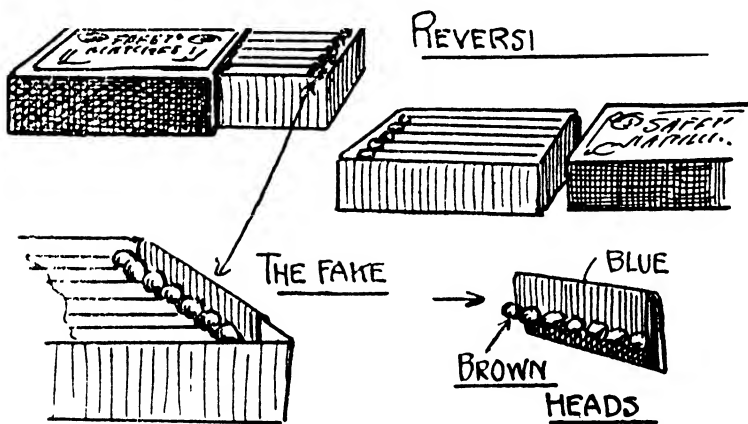
*The Missing Block.*—The performer hands out a small box, the appearance of which is shown in the accompanying illustration. Inside there is a small wheel, and below the wheel there are five coloured blocks of wood—red, yellow, blue, brown, and green. There is also an inner lid which conceals the blocks.



In showing the trick to the audience, the magician calls attention to the little wheel, and says that it possesses a peculiar property. Someone is asked to remove one of the blocks and to replace the little lid concealing the remaining blocks. The performer takes the box and moves the wheel round and, after some hesitation, says that by means of the wheel he finds that the block taken away was—he names the colour. The trick can be repeated several times, for it is extremely unlikely that anyone will fathom the secret.

The illustrations give the secret away. Concealed in the box is an electric battery with a tiny bulb. When a block has been removed, the performer, knowing just where to press on the bottom of the box to make the connection, presses at that point and the bulb lights up. The tiny inner lid then becomes sufficiently transparent to enable him to see which block is missing; and that is how it is done. The battery can easily be renewed when necessary by taking off the bottom of the box.

*The Reversible Matches.*—This is a capital pocket trick, and it will appeal to any magician who likes “something



### AS FITTED ON TO DRAWER

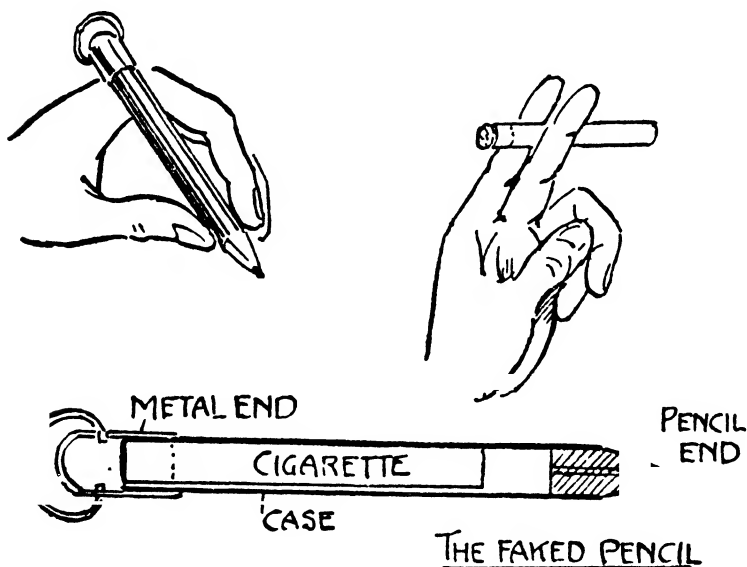
to do " in a trick, for the effect, small as it is, requires some skill to make it convincing.

A box of safety matches is tossed out for examination. When the performer gets it back he opens the box and says, jokingly, that he wants to make sure that no one has been walking away with his matches. He opens the box and closes it again. Then he pushes the drawer out a little way and calls attention to the fact that the heads of the matches can be seen. He closes the box and continues pushing through the drawer, when the audience see that the matches have apparently turned round in the box, for the heads are now visible at the other end.

The conjurer appears to overhear a suggestion that he

dare not show the other ends of the matches—the ends he first showed. He quietly pushes the drawer through, and the audience see that there are no heads on the “other end.” The box is again given out for examination.

When the performer first opened the box with the excuse that he wished to see if anyone had been taking his matches, he secretly palmed in a little fake, composed of a row of heads of matches attached to a piece of tin covered with blue paper to represent the end of the box. The tin is bent so that it can be fixed on to the end of the drawer. When



the performer opens the box again he pushes the drawer and shows the little fake, which the audience take to be the real heads of the matches. In closing the drawer and pushing it through—to show that the matches have apparently turned round—the magician palms away the fake. Thus he is able to push the drawer back again and show that the matches are unprepared. In good hands this little trick is a real mystery.

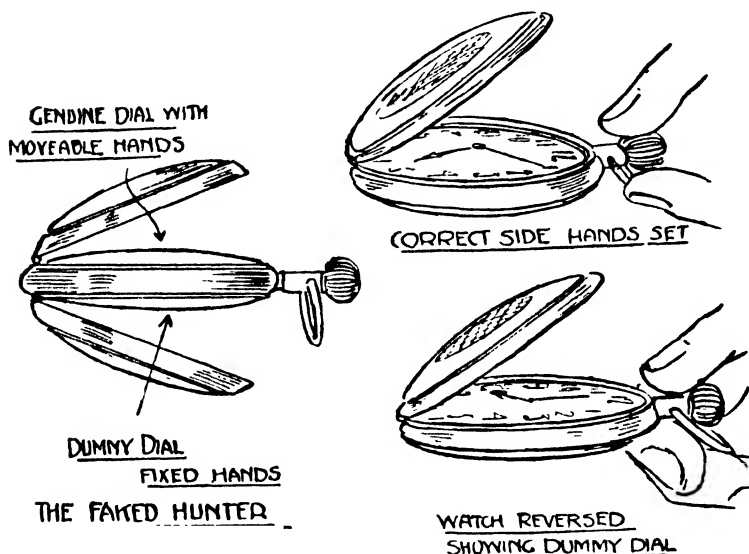
*A Pencil and a Cigarette.*—This is merely a little trick “prop,” with which the conjurer can get a laugh during the performance of a trick in which a pencil is used. The

performer is about to write something down on a slip of paper, but says that the point of the pencil has broken.

"Never let a little thing like that worry you," he says to the audience. "If a pencil won't write do this with it." In a second he has converted the pencil into a cigarette.

Part of the pencil is the cigarette, as the illustration shows. By quickly removing the metal end and the pointed end of the pencil and keeping the two ends hidden in his hand, the performer does the trick; the cigarette is there, ready to be held in the usual way.

*Telling the Time.*—I would ask the reader not to put this



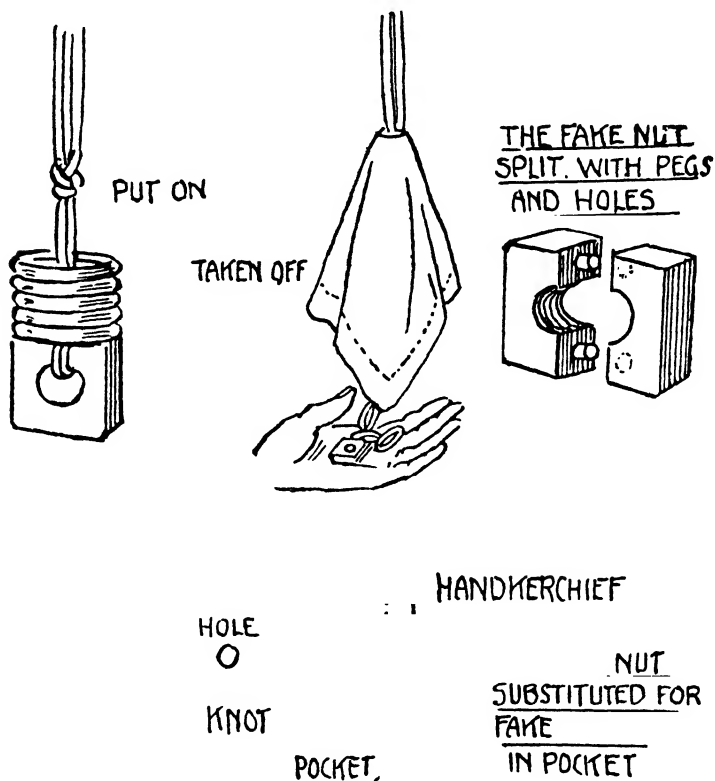
little trick on one side merely because the secret is very simple; simplicity and subtlety sometimes go together.

The performer takes out his watch—a hunter—and, opening the case and moving the hands, shows that it is just an ordinary watch. He then closes the case, hands it to a member of the audience, and asks him to move the hands in either direction; when this has been done the watch, still closed, is to be returned to the conjurer.

Without looking at the watch, the performer holds it to his forehead and at once names the time indicated by the hands. He opens the case and shows that his guess is correct.



I said that the secret was particularly simple—it is. The watch is a hunter of which one “half” is normal; the hands can be set at any hour. But the other “half” is not normal; it is a duplicate dial with hands fixed at a time known to the performer, who merely has to take care to open one side of the watch when he is convincing the



audience that it is just an ordinary watch, and to open the other side of the watch at the end of the trick.

*A Mysterious Release.*—The performer passes a metal nut on to a piece of stout string, brings the two ends together, and then ties a knot with the two strings, about two inches away from the nut. Half a dozen small brass rings are then threaded on the two strings and, of course, rest on the

nut. It is obvious to everyone that the rings cannot pass over the nut and that the nut is securely tied on the string.

The conjurer next threads both strings through a hole in a handkerchief, which falls down, concealing the nut and the rings. A member of the audience is asked to hold the two strings. The performer puts his hands under the handkerchief and quickly removes the nut and the rings. Anyone is at liberty to examine these.

The nut which is threaded on the string is a faked one. It is divided in two ; one half has two small pegs soldered to it, and in the other half two small holes, to take the pegs, are made. When the two halves are put together, the join is invisible and the faked nut can be given out for examination *to some audiences*.

In one corner of the handkerchief a small pocket is stitched ; in it is an unprepared nut, similar in appearance to the one threaded on the string. When the performer has his hands under the handkerchief he removes the faked nut, drops it down his sleeve for the time being, and gets hold of the unprepared nut.

The rings, of course, come away directly the faked nut has been removed. At the conclusion of the trick the rings and nut can be examined ; no one is likely to wish to look at the handkerchief.

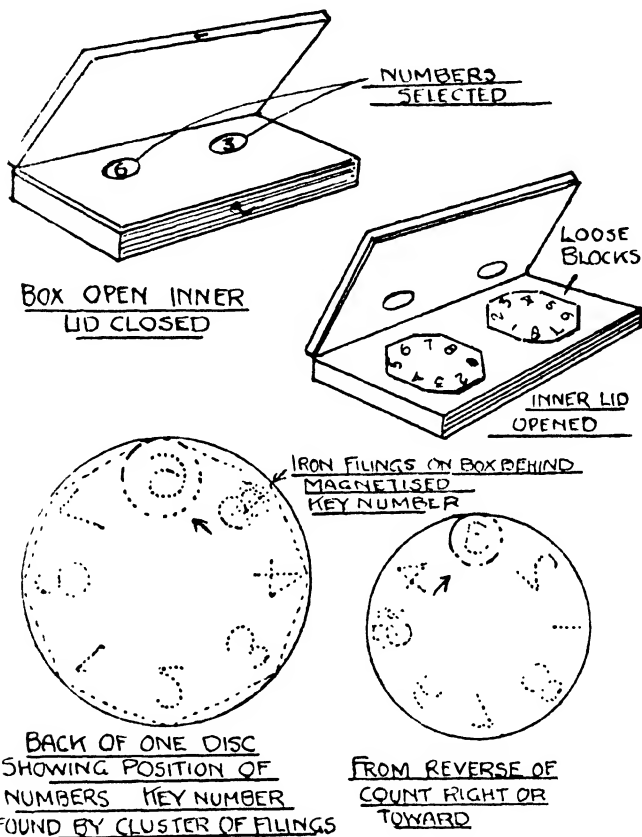
*Numbers, please !*—The performer shows a small flat box with two little holes sunk into it. The holes are eight-sided, and two small blocks of wood rest in them. The blocks have the figures one to eight painted round them. An inner lid with two holes in it permits of one number on each block being seen when this inner lid is closed. The inner lid is then concealed by closing the lid of the box.

The box and the blocks are first given out for thorough examination and the performer shows—without calling attention to the fact—that he has nothing concealed in his hands.

A member of the audience is invited to place the blocks in the box in any position he likes ; this person is then asked to close the inner lid and to remember which numbers are visible through the two holes in the inner lid. The outer lid is then to be closed.

## 282 SECRETS OF FAMOUS ILLUSIONISTS

The conjurer takes the box and puts it down for a moment while he explains what has happened. He assures the audience that the experiment he is about to try is one of pure thought-reading, and he asks the member of the audience who puts the blocks in the box to think intently



of the two numbers which were visible when the inner lid was closed. He then announces what the numbers were. The box is opened by anyone and the experiment is seen to have been successful.

This is an ingenious little trick. Under one of the numbers on each block is concealed a tiny magnet. When the performer puts the box down on the table, he really places it over a tiny pile of iron filings concealed under

some cigarette ash on a tray and hidden by a box of cigarettes. The filings adhere to two places at the bottom of the box. When he is holding the box to his forehead for a moment, the performer notes the position of the filings and is able to calculate the numbers which are at the top of the box and are therefore visible when the inner lid is closed. The two key numbers are the same, of course. In placing the box on the table again, he can easily push away the filings and the box can at once be examined.

*All Change!*—This surprising effect with five cards is well worth the little practice it entails.

Five cards are taken from the waistcoat pocket which have been placed therein previously with faces inwards. They are squared up and slightly bridged, so that the backs are concaved lengthwise.

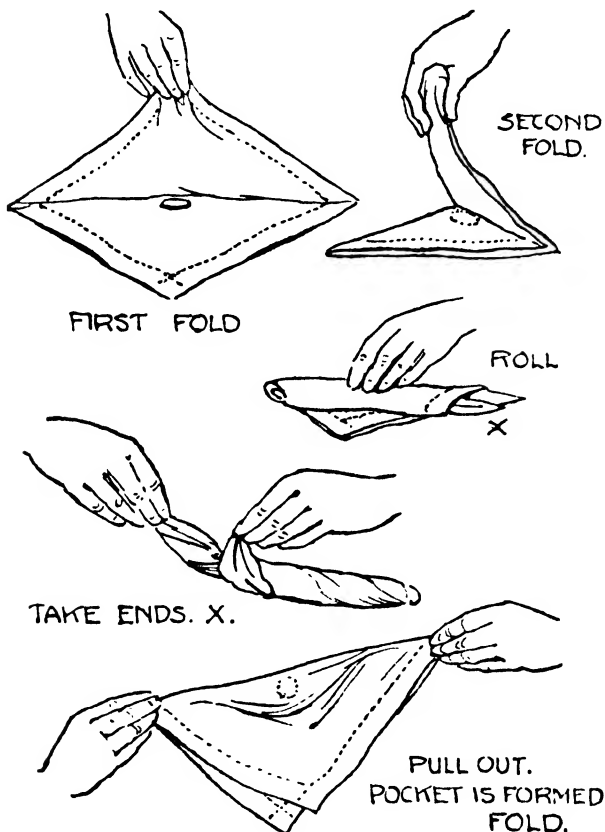
The cards are then held in the right hand, with the second, third, and fourth fingers on the inner side of the cards when held faces upward—thumb on the outer side. The performer remarks, “*I carry these cards separate from the pack as they are all alike.*” You now show they are all alike by the following means.

Hold, as described, the faces upward. The first finger lifts up the card underneath, viz, the top card, and as the hand is turned over the card is lifted by the first finger and is thrown face downward on the table. The remaining cards are at once turned face upward again and the same card is displayed. The movement is repeated until the five cards are face downward on the table.

When these movements are properly executed it is impossible to say that the faced card was not thrown. Now pick up the cards faces down and deal them in a row, from left to right. The bottom card (the one shown five times) is now the first card at the left of the row. Take a card from the pack, and, beginning at the right of the row turn over the end card (with the one taken from the pack) as carelessly as you like to show the card has changed to another, and follow with the others in succession until you come to the last card ; this you turn over by means known as the “*Mexican turn-over,*” which leaves the card from the pack in your hand on the table instead of the one

picked up—a movement entirely undetectable when properly executed, thus showing all the cards to be different instead of all alike. I am indebted to my friend Mr. G. W. Hunter for this secret.

*The Findlay Disappearing Sixpence.*—This novel trick is



really performed by a member of the company; the conjurer simply gives instructions.

A gentleman's pocket handkerchief and a sixpence are borrowed and someone from the company is invited to come forward.

Under the direction of the conjurer, the assistant spreads the handkerchief out flat on the table and places the sixpence in the centre of it. The assistant is then asked to

fold any corner of the handkerchief to the centre, thus covering the coin, and then to fold the opposite corner over in the same way.

The performer continues the folding until the little bundle is about two inches wide ; he then brings the right corner over to the left, thus folding the rolled-up handkerchief in half. Suddenly the conjurer picks up the handkerchief by two corners and shows that the sixpence has vanished ; at any time during the working of the trick he can show that he has not secretly obtained possession of the coin ; he does not touch it at any time.

The whole secret is in the rapidity with which the performer picks up the handkerchief. He must pull the two corners apart quickly so that the handkerchief is taut.

The sixpence is safely hidden in the handkerchief at the end of the trick ; the folds prevent it from falling.

THE END













